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EDITORIAL

Under the editorship of Niall M Robertson, the *Pictish Arts Society Journal* has become **the** forum for presentation and discussion of a wide range of topics relating to Early Medieval Scotland. Some of the aims of the Society are to affirm the importance of Pictish culture to Scotland's history and prehistory, to further awareness and understanding of the art and symbolism of the Pictish stones, to promote interest in all aspects of the early history of Scotland and to encourage the development of research and fieldwork. The *Journal* acts as a catalyst in meeting these objectives. Many members of the Pictish Arts Society are unable to attend the PAS lecture series in Edinburgh for a number of reasons (e.g. they live in Parkdale, Australia) and rely upon the *Journal* to keep up to date with new ideas, finds, museum news and new publications. Niall Robertson has done a first class job as Editor of *Pictish Arts Society Journal* from its inception in 1992 until his recent move overseas. It is important to keep the *Journal* flourishing and it is intended to (at least) maintain the high standard already attained. The original intention to publish the *Journal* three times a year has never yet been achieved. However, with our increasing membership, and the current high level of interest in post-Roman and Early Historic/Early Medieval Scotland, it may be possible to do this.

As can be seen from the Contents List opposite, *Journal 8* contains a number of interesting papers, notes and book reviews as well as bringing news of the discovery of a series of new stones at Kirriemuir, Angus and of the recent resurrection of the Collessie Stone, North-east Fife. Seventeen new stones have been found at Kirriemuir in March/April 1995 giving further evidence to the likelihood of Kirriemuir having an important early ecclesiastical centre/monastery (presumably with powerful secular patronage) on par with Meigle in Perthshire. As we go to press news is emerging from Easter Ross of some further evidence to confirm our previous speculation of an important ecclesiastic centre at Portmahomack (see *Pictish Arts Society Field Guide 2; In and around Easter Ross*, 1, 20).

Portmahomack, on the Tarbat peninsula of Easter Ross, has long been considered an Early Christian site. Work by PAS member Jill Harden in 1991, after excavating the *vallum* surrounding the 18th century 'Old Church' of Tarbat, suggested that there had been a Pictish settlement of considerable size in the area. The place-name *Portmahomack* itself refers to the 'port of Colmack' — understood to refer to St Colman or *Cholmaig* who was Bishop of Lindisfarne from AD 660–664. He left Northumbria for Iona after the controversial Synod of Whitby in 664, and is said to have laboured hard in Easter Ross and to have had a chapel and settlement on the 'Chapelhill' of Portmahomack. Several fragments of Early Christian cross slabs have been found in the area, including a famous one which bears an inscription in Latin dated to the early 8th century. The style of letters on this particular fragment is so similar to those used in the Lindisfarne Gospels that it provides evidence of an 'Insular' early monastic *scriptorium* at Portmahomack. The 1994 season excavations at Portmahomack under the guidance of Professor M.O.H. Carver of the University of York were slightly disappointing, only revealing a circular building and oven in the southernmost area investigated contemporary with the enclosing *vallum*. The 1995 season, not yet complete, has already been more revealing — a house has now been uncovered, 10m wide by at least 14m long with a rounded end and side walls which bow towards each other and it was built on a rubble foundation with an inner row of wooden posts. The team has also found a souterrain, hearths and evidence of metalworking. More excitingly, however, a new Pictish stone has been found — by none other than our former Editor, Niall M. Robertson. Niall was carrying out some routine cleaning of stones in the crypt of the church. Cleaning one built into the barrel-vault of the crypt Niall immediately recognised the Pictish carvings. They include Celtic spiral ornamentation and animals together with the figures of three bearded clerics holding books. "It is the find of a lifetime," Niall is reported as saying in the *Scotsman* "it is not only important for understanding the site, but a superb work of art." We hope to be able to produce a full report in the next edition of *Pictish Arts Society Journal.*

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Editor

The Date and Significance of the Ardchattan Stone

Lloyd Laing

The Ardchattan stone, now located in Ardchattan Priory, Argyll, although probably originally from some other location in the neighbourhood, has caused some debate with regard to its date and affinities.

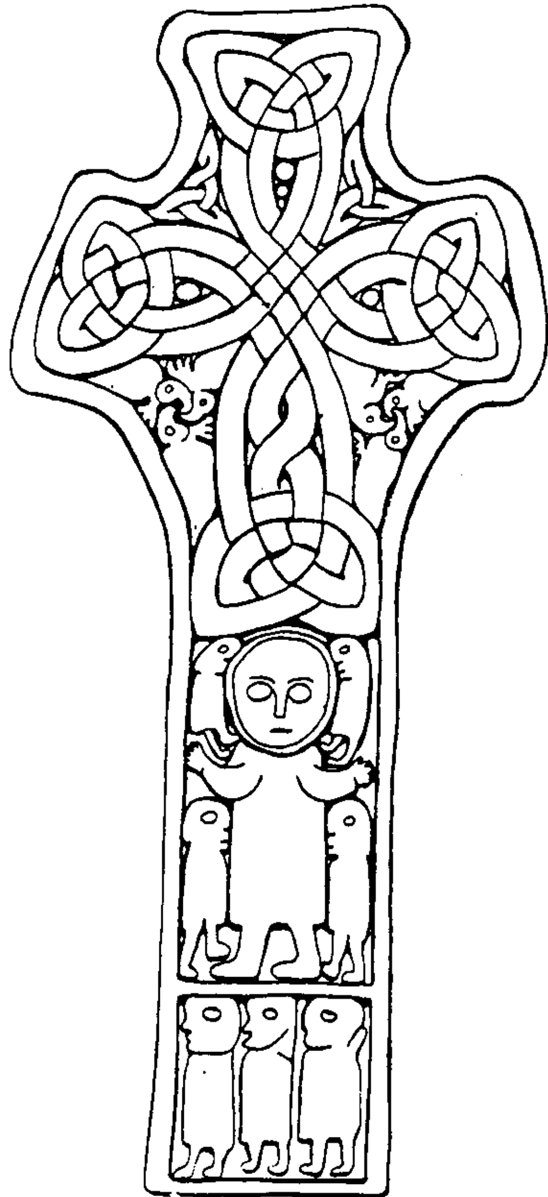
It is a slab of local gneiss, decorated on one face only with shallow relief work, on which the detail is not as clear now as it appears to have been when Allen and Anderson described it (1903, Part III, 377–78). The slab is fractured along both sides, particularly the left. The principal decoration comprises a wheel-headed cross, decorated with interlace, a human figure with flanking beasts, spiral and fret ornament, with flanking figures of animals and men. In the centre of the crossing of the cross is a roundel of linked 'Durrow spiral' and trumpet patterns.

Allen and Anderson did not comment on the date in their consideration of its ornament. Mrs Curle drew attention to similarities in its ornament to that found on certain slabs in Co Donegal, assigned to the seventh century by Françoise Henry and others, while pointing out that it displayed 'several features which indicate a later date', in particular singling out post-Viking monuments in the Isle of Man (Curle 1940, 80). R B K Stevenson studied the ornament in greater detail, arguing that a tenth century date was probable for both the Ardchattan stone and for the Donegal monuments (1956, 93–96), though his suggested dating for the Donegal stones met with little favour at the time. Without repeating any of his arguments, the Royal Commission accepted Stevenson's date in their *Inventory of Argyll* (RCAHMS 1975, 22, 110–11).

The main point of comparison between the Ardchattan cross-slab and the Donegal monuments lies in their shared use of an unusual type of interlace, with broad bands with a narrow border down each edge. Recently the Donegal monuments, of which the most relevant here are the Carndonagh and Fahan Mura slabs, have been the subject of a study by Harbison, who has put forward a convincing case for assigning them to the ninth century (1986). In this discussion he drew attention to the fact that the interlace had been paralleled by Henry and others to that found in an early Durham manuscript, the A II 10 (datable to *c.* 650) and to interlace in the Book of Durrow (later seventh century). Harbison however pointed out that the same type of interlace occurs in the Gospels of MacDurnan, datable to the ninth century (late ninth according to Alexander 1978, 86) and in the Cotton Vitellius Psalter, datable no earlier than the ninth (Harbison 1986, 51–52). Harbison also drew attention to the fact that the same type of interlace occurs on the *Domnach Airgid*, an Irish multi-period shrine, where it is combined with a type of diagonal fret pattern which, though in detail unique, is generally of a type datable to the second half of the eighth or first half of the ninth century (for a date *c.* 800, Ó Floinn in Ryan 1983, 177). This type of interlace is extremely rare in Scotland, though it occurs at

Farnell, Angus on a Pictish slab (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 219–20). Stevenson, seeking parallels, compared it with the interlace on the Fife casket, which he believed to be of the tenth century (1956, 94). However, a study by Steer and Bannerman has shown that the Fife and the related Eglinton casket is most probably a West Highland product of the sixteenth century (1977, 175–76). The Fife casket employs the device of filling angles in the interlace with pellets, and this feature Stevenson saw as a parallel for the interlace on the Ardchattan stone, and one which he considered of Scandinavian origin (1956, 94). But 'pellets' that Stevenson saw in the Ardchattan interlace are not pellets as such but teeth belonging to serpents, as Allen and Anderson correctly observed (1903, Part III, 378). Stevenson's arguments about a tenth century date on this evidence cease to be valid.

The Archattan cross-slab (after ECMS)



Cross at Cardonagh, Ireland (after enry)

Stevenson argued that the split interlace (as he saw it) was a Scandinavian feature. But in point of fact, the 'splits' are not splits as such but the jaws of four serpents emerging from a central roundel. This is simply a variation on the 'snake-boss' motif here rendered in low relief. This motif is first seen on the Iona crosses and on a small group of Pictish slabs. It has been extensively debated, most notably by Henderson (1987) and by Mac Lean (1993), and has been seen as having a connotation of Redemption. Mac Lean's arguments that the snake boss motif is Dalriadic in origin carries conviction. In Pictland it appears at a late stage in the development of the Boss Style, and occurs on the St Andrews sarcophagus, which Henderson has suggested may have been made for the enshrinement of Oengus son of Fergus (d. 761) (Mac Lean 1993, 252).

Previous commentators have remarked upon a number of superficial similarities between the Manx Viking-period sculptures and the Ardchattan stone. A feature which unites all the Manx stones is the device of a knotwork pattern in which the interlace strands pass from opposite arm to opposite arm rather than running from one adjacent arm to the next (Bailey 1980, 219). On the Ardchattan slab this feature is absent, since the interlace patterns are broken by the central roundel. More problematic however is the use of a tendril which extends from the interlace to join the spirals in the central roundel. Superficially, this feature recalls the linking tendril used, for example, on Gaut's Cross in the Isle of Man and on some Anglo-Scandinavian pieces in England. In all these Viking period works the tendril is used to bind the crossing of two interlacing strands (Bailey 1980, 218–19). The tendril on the Ardchattan Stone is used to bind the interlace with the central roundel, and is in fact a stylised zoomorph, much closer in conception to the treatment of the snakes in the snake-boss on the head of the Dromiskin, Co Louth Cross, of the ninth century (Henry 1965, Pl 82).

The St Andrews sarcophagus, despite its very different style, is important for a study of the Ardchattan stone, since the Warrior David at St Andrews carries a rectangular notched shield of identical type to that found carried by the warrior on the Ardchattan stone. Such shields are nowhere else found in Early Christian Celtic sculpture, and either they represent a short-lived shield type or suggest that there was a common model for the artists working on both monuments.

The snake boss device was taken up in Ireland, where an interesting variation on the Ardchattan stone design can be seen on the High Cross at Killamery (Henry 1965, Pl 67) — here open mouthed toothed serpents bite one another, their bodies turning into interlace below a central, unattached, boss. Above, their tails are attacked by an animal head similar to that biting the wings on the Ardchattan seraph (see below). Closer in some respects to the Ardchattan stone snake boss is the design on a slab from Gallen Priory, Co Offaly (Henry 1965, Pl 65) where a whorl of snakes have heads which alternately bite human heads and point to them. Both these monuments belong to the ninth century.

The Farnell slab is also of some interest for comparative purposes as it has a hipped top, reminiscent of that on the Aberlemno, Angus, Churchyard slab, and is also closely similar to the form of the Fahan Mura slab. In keeping with the Aberlemno slab, the Farnell monument has a pair of confronted serpents on the back, also found, for example, on the Dunfallandy stone. While there are good reasons for dating the Aberlemno Churchyard and Dunfallandy stones to the earlier eighth century, several features of the Farnell stone point to a later, probably ninth century, date. The angel surmounting a cross design of the reverse of the Farnell stone is again a counterpart of that at Ardchattan.

The ringed cross of the Ardchattan stone is one which is of a type found in the free-standing crosses of Dalriada (Kelly 1993 for Dalriadic crosses) but less commonly found in Pictland (though the Farnell cross is generally similar — for the Pictish cross form, Henderson 1993, and for examples of this form, Allen & Anderson 1903, Part II, 52). The slab, then, seems to echo the Dalriadic type of free-standing cross.

Turning to the other features of the ornament, the figure at the top of the cross has a lower body which turns into interlace. This figure, holding a book, has been seen as being flanked by two animals, but careful examination shows that in fact the 'bodies' of the animals are wings, above which are animal heads with open mouths gripping the top of the wings; in other words, this figure is a seraph. This type of figure occurs in metalwork, in particular it appears on a mount from Brougham, Cumbria (Laing 1993, 242; Bailey 1977) datable to the eighth century, which Bailey has been seen as being possibly Pictish. The same device is found on an Irish cross-shaft from Cloinmacnois, Co Offaly, and in a variant form on a Pictish stone at Meigle, no 22, Perthshire (Allen & Anderson 1903, Part III, 337) and within Dalriada on a weathered free standing cross from A' Chill, Canna (Kelly 1993, fig 27.5*f*) — the Canna monument also has similar key patterns to that on the Ardchattan stone. The parallels for the device all lie within the eighth to ninth centuries. The treatment of the seraph's wings with the herringbone infill is in keeping with metalwork of the eighth to ninth centuries.

The animals all have their counterparts in Pictish and Irish sculpture of the eighth to ninth centuries. In particular, the two on the right side are similar to those on the mid-ninth century Moone Cross, which is also characterised by snake-boss ornament, and was a Columban foundation, though they can also be paralleled in the crosses at Iona itself.

The roundel on the head with its trumpet patterns and linked Durrow spirals is of considerable antiquity. Although the precise form found at Ardchattan is without parallel, the motif generally is found for example on hanging-bowl escutcheons of the sixth to seventh centuries, in the Book of Durrow, and with three rather than four spirals on a mount from the West of Scotland (possibly Iona) datable to the late eighth or early ninth century (Laing 1993, no 173). A similar type of design is used as the centre on the Kilnave, Islay, cross (RCAHMS 1984, 220–

22), generally regarded as probably the earliest of the Dalriadic series. There is no instance of this motif known to me however after the ninth century.

The linked spiral pattern on the cross-shaft is, as Allen and Anderson noted, without exact parallel, though the type of ornament is common on ninth century Pictish monuments and on Irish High Crosses of the same period. The same may be said for the fret pattern on the wheel. The key pattern at Ardchattan occurs fairly widely but rarely. The most useful monument for comparison is the fine Nigg slab, Easter Ross, usually dated to the ninth century and the Aberlemno, Angus, Roadside slab, usually also dated to the ninth.

The three clerics with musical instruments are of exceptional interest. The harpist is easy to parallel on Pictish monuments (discussion in Laing & Laing 1984, 285), the figure with the pan pipes can be matched at Lethendy, Perthshire (Laing & Laing 1984, 285; for the pipes, Fisher & Greenhill 1972), and also in Ireland at Clonmacnois and Monasterboice (Baines 1960, 59), but the figure with the rattle (if that is what it is) is without known parallel.

The slab was probably intended as the marker of the grave of a founder (for comparable examples, cf. Herity 1993), and the iconography seems to relate to Redemption and Resurrection. The use of the central snake boss, the musicians, possibly an allusion to Relevations 4 (Allen & Anderson 1903, Part III, 378), and the animals, again possibly from the same source, may all relate to this theme. The two on the right may represent the lion and the ox of Relevations 4, the creature with a face like a man and the eagle perhaps being represented on the badly damaged left hand side. While essentially a product of Dalriada, features of its design point to a close familiarity with Pictland and the Pictish cross slabs of the later eighth or ninth centuries. As such, it is another example of the confluence of Irish and Pictish art in Dalriada.

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Animal Masks and Costumes

Althea Tyndale

Some of the animals on the Pictish symbol stones may quite possibly depict animal masks (e.g. the Ardross deer) and animal costumes (e.g. Rhynie 5; Norrie's Law Hoard; in stylised form possibly also Mortlach, and the 'flower' symbol). More detailed scenes are seen on Class II stones at Murthly and at Rossie, Perthshire and at Kettins, Angus (Henderson 1967, 140 illus.). The Mortlach Battle Stone (very clearly illustrated in Marianna Lines' *Sacred Stones Sacred Places*, p.107) is a rare depiction of a mask on its own, and also in use: reading downwards, three symbols (eagle, uncurled snake, bull's head) are placed above a figure on horseback, wearing a bull's head mask, and accompanied by a dog similar to a collie. In some cases the reason for a human wearing an animal skin is obvious, such as for hunting (e.g. Shandwick cross slab, Easter Ross: deer hunter with cross-bow; St Vigeans 1, 'The Drosten Stone': boar hunter with cross-bow. The figure is a typical model.).

The wearing of a full bear, tiger, lion or other large animal skin by the *vexillarius*, *cornicen* and *signifer* of the Roman army persists to this day in the skin worn by the drummer in a military band. A bearskin head-dress is still worn by the Guards. Could it be feasible that the Pictish military musicians wore the skin appropriate to that 'clan'? For instance, were the dog-headed carnyxes, presumably those of the *cynbyn* of Eitin mentioned in the *c.* 12th century Welsh poem *Pa gur* (ll.43–51), borne and blown by warriors wearing the appropriate 'totem' skin, either as a distinctive headdress or as a full hooded cape? Their leader, Gwrgi Garwlwyd, whose name means 'man-dog rough-grey', which would imply a wolf rather than a dog (TYP 32), was killed by Diffydell, one of the three sons of Dysgyfdawd, who were chieftains of Deira and Bernicia (TYP 10), on the shores of Tryfrwyd (Nennius HB c56 – 10th in the list of Arthur's battles; not yet identified with certainty). According to *Pa gur*, Arthur fought with dogheads on the mountain of Edinburgh, and they were slain in their hundreds, falling before Bedwyr. Cai, a hero whose associations centre around the Snowdon region of north Wales, also seems to be associated with Arthur and Bedwyr in this same battle (ll.52–57).

The background then appears to be similar to, and probably contemporary with, that of the *Gododdin*. Note that Golistan's son, Urfai, one of the warband of the lord of Eidyn, was usually in the front line of battle against the Deirans. 'Golistan' seems to be a British rendering of the Saxon name *Wulf*stan (Koch 1995), which means the same as the Celtic 'Gwrgi Garwlwyd'. 'Urfai' could also be a spelling of a lenited form of 'Gwrgi'. A Saxon name in Edinburgh would imply non-British allies, presumably fighting against equally mixed stock from Deira and Bernicia, as well as against more purely British troops from elsewhere. Also note the description of Tudfwlch (Jackson (ed.) 1969, 111): 'the hero red in his fury, the man-slaying champion, was wont to be joyful like a wolf at his post, the wolf of the army'.

References to heroes compared to wolves are frequent throughout the poem, and it is difficult to assess what is conventional adjective and what may be reference to clan totem.

There are many tales of shape-changing, such as those in the *Fourth Branch* of the Mabinogion, brought about by the enchantments of Gwydion vab Don, another figure associated with north Wales. (See the enchantments in *Math vab Mathonwy* and in the *Cat Goddeu*; see also TYP pp. 400–02. Gwydion's father, Don, is a Celtic deity whose name appears in the Donau (Danube) and in the Irish *Tuatha Dé Danaan.*)

I would suggest that this would be well worth a deeper study in relation to the Pictish symbol stones.

The extraordinary enchantment of two men into a pair of animals as punishment for sin is worthy of note. In *Culhwch and Olwen* (CO), no.6 in the list of the things required by Yspaddaden for his daughter's wedding feast is 'Two horned oxen: one is beyond Mynydd Bannawg, one on this side – together in one plough – that is, Nyniaw and Peibiaw, transformed by God into oxen for their sins' — viz., presumably two chieftains who would not normally tolerate being linked in harmony. They are the third pair of oxen required by Yspaddaden, the others being the two oxen of Gwlwlydd Wineu; and the Yellow Pale-White and the Speckled Ox. These are referred to in TYP 45:

> Three prominent oxen of the Island of Britain:
> Yellow Pale-White (Melyn Gwanwyn)
> and Chestnut, ox of Gwylwylyd,
> and the Speckled Ox.

('Gwylwylyd' may be an old dual: gwlw + llwyd, 'Grey-notched'. Perhaps the two pairs of oxen mentioned in CO are a confused rendering of the Triad – after all, pairs are a more natural arrangement for oxen than triads. TYP p.117).

Triads 63 and 64 also contain references to this:

Triad 63:–

> Three *Bull* (var. Stag) Spectres of the Island of Britain:
> Gwidawl. Llyr Marini. Gyrthmwl Wledig.

and Triad 64:–

> Three Wild Spectres of the Island of Britain:
> Banawg. Ednyfedawg the Sprightly. Melen.

The implication of 'spectre', *ellyll*, is of men who became 'outside' themselves, sometimes in visibly animal form. Perhaps Gwrgi Garwlwyd of Edinburgh was 'beside himself' with battle fury, like Cu Chulainn (another 'dog' figure!) and looked like a ravening werewolf, in addition to any distinguishing costume he may have been wearing.

Gvidawl is perhaps related to Gwidolwyn the Dwarf, who had 'thermos flasks' in which the blood of the Black Witch, daughter of the White Witch, could be kept (CO, Yspaddaden's task

list no.19). *Llyr Marini* is elsewhere called Llyr Lledieith (= 'Half Speech' — ? of two nations); the dynasty of Dumnonia claimed descent from Llyr Lledieith. *Gwerthmwl Wledig* appears in TYP 1, 44, 63. The Grave Stanzas say: 'The grave of a chieftain of Britain in the open country of Gwynassed, where the Lliw goes into the Llychwr, in Kelli Friafel, the grave of Gwerthmwl'. This is in Carmarthenshire. *Banawg* refers to the hills between Dumbarton and Stirling, preserved in the place-name Bannockburn. *Melen/Melyn* is perhaps Melyn mab Kynvelyn. Cynfelin was an early Gwynedd hero, slain at the battle of Catraeth; his son could well have been a contemporary of Edwin, who died in 633. *Nyniaw* and *Peibiaw* are mentioned in the Liber Landavensis (Evans and Rhys (eds.) 1893, 75ff): Pepiau, king of Ercing, was father of 6th century St Dubricius; Nynniaw was king of Glamorgan and Gwent, ancestor of Marcell, mother of Brychan Brycheiniog. It is possible that the names have developed from Latin forms (Holder 1896, ii, 928) dating from the Roman occupation of North Britain, particularly around the Antonine Wall (cf. Jarman, 341). The fact that these two historical figures come one from each side of the Brecon Beacons may mean either that 'Mynydd Banawg' should read rather 'Mynydd Brycheiniog' – or, much more likely, it is typical of 12th century Welsh style, where North British heroes and events are skilfully superimposed on similar but more local Welsh historical ones and/or similar contemporary people and situations.

An even more extraordinary series of 'enchantments' is recounted in the *Mabinogi* of *Math vab Mathonwy*, where two men are punished for their misdemeanours by being transformed into a pair of wild animals, one of each gender, and obliged to live thus for a year. At the end of the year they return to court, bringing their offspring with them. The enchanter keeps the offspring, transforming him into human shape and naming him according to the type of animal he came from; and transforms the two men into another pair of animals, changing their gender, and sends them off for a further year. They are obliged to undergo three such transformations (as deer, swine and wolves) before they have expiated their crime. Their sister Arianrhod bears 'Sea son of Wave', a sort of boy/fish. The whole thing seems to be a confused mesh of ancient ritual with a rather 'unclean' feeling about it. (Gwydion also forms a dozen stallions and greyhounds (and shields) out of toadstools, which are offered in exchange for Pryderi's new-fangled and prized domestic pigs. This spell only lasts for twenty-four hours. One might also note the preponderance of *pigs* in all these early Welsh tales.)

Transformation into animal form is a common folk-tale motif. Various forms occur, such as water monsters (but not the kelpie, which seems to be a creature in its own right and not a transformed human being), cats, birds, wolves and others. Warriors, both male and female, were frequently referred to under animal forms. Two examples will suffice here: Gall (= 'foreigner'), one of the sons of Dysgyfdawd mentioned above, slew the two 'birds' of Gwenddoleu the Pict, leader of one of the warbands involved in the battle of Arfderydd. They wore a 'yoke of gold', and ate a couple of Cymry for dinner and tea every day – i.e. they were presumably a pair of princeling allies who fought with the Picts against the British (TYP 32,

and pp.379–80). Coll son of Collfrewy acts as 'swineherd' (= guardian, foster-father) of Henwen (= 'Old White') the 'sow' of Dallwyr Dallben; in Gwent she gave birth to a 'grain of wheat' and a 'bee'; in Pembroke, a 'grain of barley' and a 'bee'; in Snowdonia, a 'wolf-cub' and a young 'eagle'. (Snowdonia in Welsh is 'Eryri' = 'Eagles' Nest'; the onomastic opportunity is exploited). The 'eagle' was given in fosterage to Brennach the Irishman of North Wales, and the 'wolf cub' to Menwaedd of Arllechwed, a little further to the south. The 'sow' then bore a 'kitten' near what is now called Carnarvon, which Coll threw into the Menai – but she was not drowned, and survived as the 'wildcat' of Anglesey, and was later slain by Cai. (*Pa gur* ll.81–90; TYP pp.485–86). 'Cow', 'pig', 'bitch', 'beast', etc., are still used to this day to designate a particular type of character, and are usually simply derogatory descriptions which are not at all intended to be taken literally.

I would like to suggest that certain transformations into animal form – in particular wolf form – could be based partly on reality that has more to do with plain fact than with any rude epithet or paranormal effect. As Christianity made its impact, so previous cults would disappear 'underground' (possibly literally, in the search for a good hiding-place). Very often it was the women who adhered principally to the upholding of time-honoured cultural and religious practices. So one gets the folk-tale of the woman-werewolf who is surprised and injured while in wolf-form at night; on returning home she does not rise from her bed in the morning, and is found to have a missing hand or forearm. The person who had injured her in wolf form brings in the wolf paw and arm, and the injuries tally (Bechstein 1982, 56–57). If the woman had been wearing a wolf costume and had slipped out quietly at night at regular intervals to perform some pre-Christian ritual as part of her membership of that particular animal-totem group, it is of course natural that any injury to the costume would also injure her .

In case this should be thought to be too glib a 20th century rationalisation of such a motif, the following tale is worthy of consideration:

A man and a woman are found in werewolf form, condemned to remain in their wolf costumes for a seven-year cycle, after which they will return to the community and a new pair will be elected to replace them. The wife being ill wishes nonetheless to die as a Christian, and a passing priest is persuaded to come and administer the last rites to her. The husband *peels back the wolfskin* so that the priest may see that she really *is* human and anoint her human skin with holy oil, and give her a last Communion (Giraldus Cambrensis *Topographia Hiberniae,* XIX).

This clearly implies a costume – it is implied that they go upright on two feet, not on all four paws; the costume can be removed, though it fits very closely (maybe they were sewn into it at the very start of their period of service). Their 'punishment', ordered by the local saint, Abbot Natal of Kilmanagh, may be some kind of continuation of the fulfilment of a pagan priestly function – Irish 'Christian' practices, even in the time of Gerald of Wales, were notoriously 'pagan', and totally independent of Roman practices at any time up to and beyond the

Norman Conquest. (Perhaps Abbot Natal intended something similar to St Paul's action recorded in I Cor. 5: 1–5 ?). It seems to be a clan cult that has been in existence for a long time – and the cycle of seven years could perhaps suggest a very ancient rite. The costumes appear to be handed down from one priestly pair to the next. Going upright on two feet and not on all fours would also suggest a priestly function, a mediation between the totem animal and the humans of that group. The costume (or mask, whatever was appropriate to the clan) is not then a sign that the wearer *is* the god (like Anubis), but only that they have some priestly or other religious or cultural rôle.

Normally one associates the chief with such an important function, but here we apparently have the 'ordinary' folk of the clan taking a priestly turn (cf. perhaps *Psalm* 82:6 and *Revelation*, where *all* the faithful, saved by grace, will reign as gods under God). It is not entirely clear whether this is regarded here as an honour, a duty, or a punishment, whereas in *Math* and CO it is definitely meted out as a punishment.

The handing down of animal costumes is borne out by the pagan deer cult headdresses still preserved at Abbots Bromley, Staffordshire. There are six pairs of reindeer antlers on carved wooden deerheads which are held by each dancer on a short stick before his face. Early in September the dancers collect the antlers from the local church and proceed to the first dancing site. A circle is formed, which changes into a loop, after which the two lines of dancers (three antler-men to each side, plus the usual Hobby Horse, Fool, Musician, Boy, Robin Hood and Maid Marian) advance and retreat as though the animals they are mimicking are challenging one another. Finally they move into a single line and walk to the next site. During the day they travel 20 miles round the parish, which includes dancing at outlying houses and farms. Towards dusk they return to Abbots Bromley and dance in the street before replacing the antlers on the church wall (AA *Secret Britain*, p.190).

The fascination of the Horn Dance is that it recalls the dictum of Theodore, the seventh century Archbishop of Canterbury, who stated in the *Liber Poenitentialis* that anyone who 'goeth about as a stag or a bull-calf, that is, making himself into a wild animal, and dressing in the skins of a herd animal, and putting on the heads of the beasts; those who in such wise transform themselves into the appearance of a wild animal, let them do penance for three years, because this is devilish'. Does the three year 'penance' imposed by Gwydion in *Math* represent a deliberately and ironically distorted view of Theodore's dictum? And is the seven year 'penance' imposed on the couple from Osraige by the local Abbot also in some way connected with high authoritative ecclesiastical recommendation?

In fact, as one who has lived close to deer in the Kaufungerwald of Germany, I can say that the progression of the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance would not be dissimilar to deer marking out their territory. They make their territorial claims in May, however, but tend to follow a circuit similar to the parish bounds of a human community, challenging intruders and chasing them

off their patch. It is in September that the mature males round up their herds of females and young, and ward off other males, and male offspring grown to full adults during the year. So in this respect the Abbots Bromley Dance could be a deer-ceremony seen as bringing stability and fertility to the human community, corresponding to the deer community not only territorially but perhaps also totemically.

One wonders if similar rites lie concealed beneath the steps of certain progressive morris dances, which traditionally follow a circuit around the parish. Parishes nearly always took over pre-existing territorial units, which may also have been religious as well as administrative and geographical units.

It seems to me that references to animal masks, headdresses and costumes, such as are mentioned above, are indeed to be seen on some of the Pictish symbol stones, and they may possibly refer to a family considered to be the guardians of such matters. One may compare the 'guardianship' of totemic animals and their territories and the tribal history connected with them, by the aboriginal clans in Australia. The Kwakiutl people of western Canada also preserve totemic images and stories into our own times. Even north German and English thatch and roofing finials may preserve local animal totems, long since lost from the present culture. This is a fruitful area of comparison for anyone interested.

Indeed, this whole subject is worth a very much more detailed study than can be attempted in a preliminary article.

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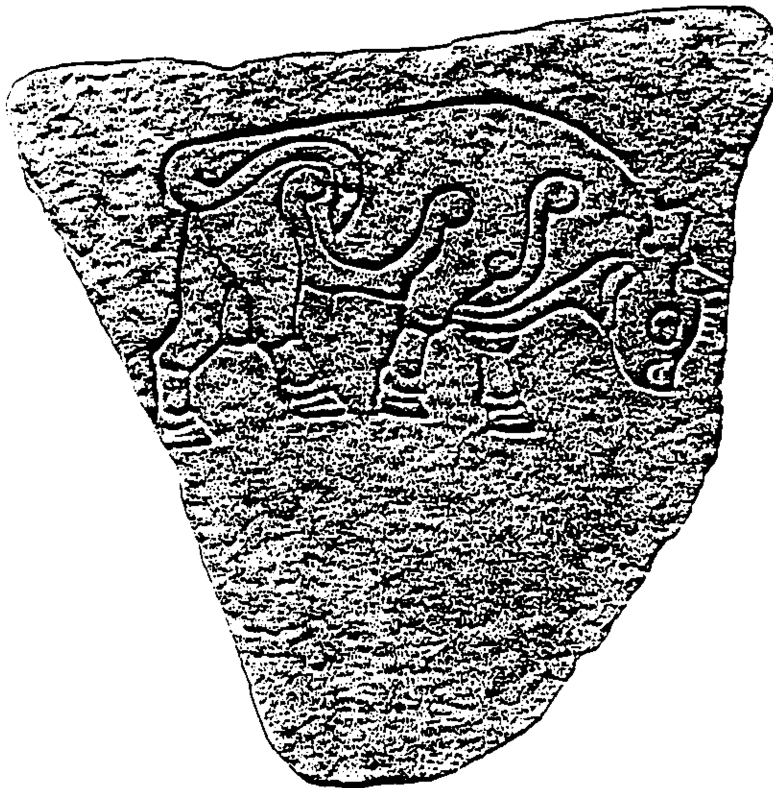
A Bull Cult at Burghead

Craig Cessford

Bulls are unique amongst Pictish symbols in that they only occur in isolation not in combination with other symbols, they are found on small stone slabs or plaques rather than the usual larger stones and they are concentrated at one single site. All this suggests that bulls are rather different from normal Pictish symbols which has led to suggestions that they are linked to a religious bull cult which was centred at Burghead where six of the nine surviving 'bull' symbols have been found (e.g. Laing and Laing 1993, 21–22). Other suggestions such as the idea that they were carved for future use elsewhere as territorial boundaries (Ritchie and Ritchie 1981, 162) or votive tablets (Jackson 1984, 19–20) seem less likely. If they were territorial markers why have none been discovered elsewhere? The votive tablet idea is based on the misapprehension that the plaques were thrown into the sea by Picts when, in fact, it was by nineteenth century building workers. How plausible is the evidence for a bull cult?



Burghead 5 (© NM Robertson)

Building work in the early nineteenth century [1805–09] destroyed much of the evidence from Burghead but some information concerning discoveries at this time survives, in addition there are some maps such as General Roy's depicting the site prior to its destruction. During the nineteenth century six plaques depicting bulls were recovered from Burghead (Allen and

Anderson 1903, Part III, 118–24) though early accounts state that there were at least thirty bull plaques. During the latter part of the nineteenth century some work including excavation took place at Burghead (MacDonald 1862; Mitchell 1874) most notably by Hugh Young (1890; 1891; 1893). More recently there has been some further limited excavation in 1966 (Small 1969) and work on pollen and dating evidence which shows that the fort was built between the fourth and sixth centuries AD and destroyed by fire in the ninth or tenth centuries (Edwards and Ralston 1978). There has also been a detailed consideration of a horn-mount from the site (Graham-Campbell 1973) and reappraisals of the site, most recently by Anna Ritchie (1989, 12–15). Other plaques depicting bovines were discovered in the nineteenth century built into structures in the Ness valley at Kingsmill and Inverness (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 102–03) and in the fort of East Lomond Hill, Fife (Corrie 1926).

East Lomond stone plaque (© JRF Burt)

How can we assess if the bull carvings from Burghead are evidence of cult activity? For a long time a variety of problems meant that archaeologists tended to ignore religious, ritual and cult activity. Certainly most treatments of Pictish paganism are unsatisfying (e.g. Henderson 1967, 67–68; Laing and Laing 1993, 21–23) though this is largely due to the paucity of evidence. Recently Colin Renfrew has considered how cult activity might leave traces in the archaeological record (Renfrew 1985; 1991; Renfrew and Bahn 1989, 359–60). He has developed a list of sixteen possible types of archaeological evidence for cult activity. Whilst there are some problems with Renfrew's system, most notably that it is rather ethnocentric and only deals with certain types of cult (Carver 1993), it does provide a useful system for assessing the strength of evidence for cult activity at a site. Several of Renfrew's categories seem to be represented at Burghead:

Focusing of attention:

(1) Can occur in a location with special natural associations.

Evidence – Burghead's location on an impressive natural sandstone promontory.

(2) May take place in a special building set apart for sacred functions.

Evidence – The 'well'.

(3) Attention focusing devices.

Evidence – None.

(4) The sacred zone is likely to be rich in repeated symbolism, this is known as redundancy.

Evidence – The large number of bull carvings; definitely six, probably twenty-five to thirty and possibly more. All six surviving bulls are very similar which supports the concept of repetition.

Boundary zone between this world and the next

(5) Conspicuous public displays and hidden mysteries which may be reflected architecturally.

Evidence – Nineteenth century excavations uncovered the foundations of rows of structures along the longer sides of the inner fort (Young 1893, 90). Between these there seems to have been an empty central space, at one end of this open area was the structure known as the 'well' or 'bath' (Young 1890; 1893, 89–90). The central area could have been used for public ceremonies while the 'well' which is a dark limited space approached by a long flight of steps could be linked to hidden mysteries.

(6) Concepts of cleanliness and pollution which can be reflected in pools, basins of water etc. and general cleanliness.

Evidence – The 'well' has a central tank over a metre deep as well as a basin and a pedestal, these are all probably linked to washing. The number of objects from the site has been described as disappointing and while this may be due to nineteenth century disturbance (Ritchie 1989, 15) it could be because the site was kept clean to start with.

Presence of deity

(7) Association with a deity may be reflected in the use of a cult image or abstract representation.

Evidence – The bull plaques.

(8) Symbols may relate iconographically to a deity and associated myths. This can involve animal symbolism, particular animals may relate to specific deities or powers.

Evidence – The bull plaques.

(9) Symbols may relate to those used in funerary rituals or other rites of passage.

Evidence – None.

Participation and Offering

(10) Prayers and special movements linked to worship may be reflected.

Evidence – None.

(11) Devices for inducing religious experiences such as music or the infliction of pain.

Evidence – Music is represented by fragments of a ninth century Anglo-Saxon blast horn (Graham-Campbell 1973). Pain could have been inflicted by weapons from the site. An early account talks of many battle-axes and spear-heads given away to English tourists (Young 1891, 445), whilst this may be an exaggeration an iron axe and bronze spear head were recovered during nineteenth century excavations (Abercromby 1907, 203; Young 1893, 91).

(12) Sacrifice of animals or humans.

Evidence – A midden beside the inner rampart contained a large number of bones, particularly bones, horn cores and skull fragments from cattle (Young 1893, 90–91). Deposits of ox skull at Yeavering [see below] and other Anglo-Saxon sites (Richards 1992, 141) appear to be linked to pagan cults and the Burghead bone report indicates a predominance of skulls. It has also been suggested that the 'well' was used for ritual human drownings (Ritchie 1989, 15).

(13) Food and drink brought and consumed or destroyed.

Evidence – The bones from the midden already mentioned.

(14) Other items brought and offered. Such votive offerings may be broken, hidden or discarded.

Evidence – The blast horn and weapons described above as well as coins which are also mentioned in old reports (Young 1891, 445) may be votive offerings. Some finds are described as coming from the bottom of the midden (Young 1893, 91) which may mean that they were deliberately hidden or discarded.

(15) Great investment in equipment and offerings.

Evidence – The Anglo-Saxon blast horn with its fittings is an impressive item. The coins and battle-axes given away in the nineteenth century are also indicative of wealth.

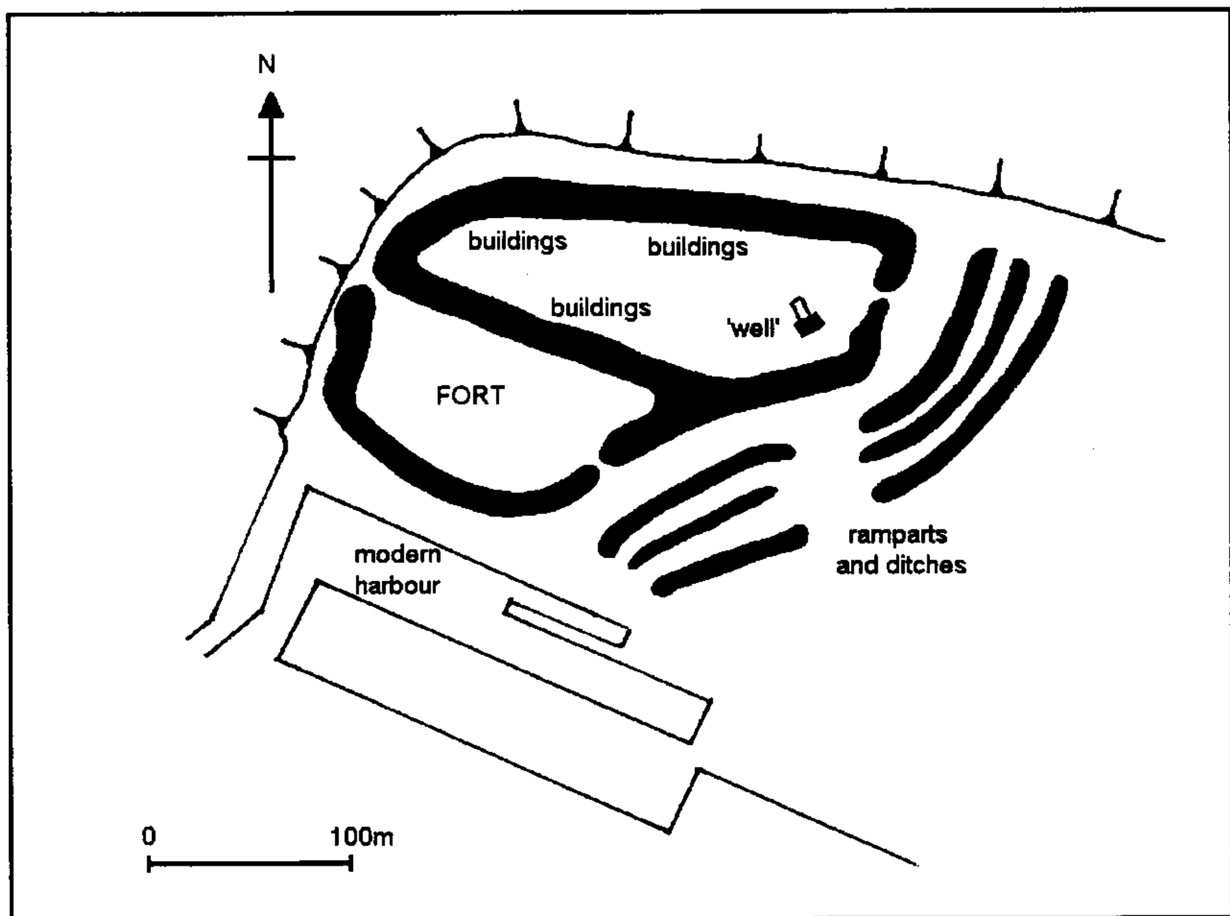
(16) Great investment of wealth in structures.

Evidence – The three lines of outer earth and rubble defences and the massive walls with coursed stone enclosing the inner fort which were seven metres wide and up to six metres high are all impressive structures. The 'well' also represents a considerable investment of effort as it is cut into rock and the buildings are of substantial structure with walls approximately a metre wide and over ten metres long.

Of Renfrew's sixteen categories thirteen seem to be represented at Burghead. Although the evidence for some is rather tenuous, categories 4, 5, 6, 8 and 16 are well demonstrated at the site. Other evidence that strengths the argument for Burghead being a cult site are 'two stone coffins of a rude type' discovered in the 1860s (Young 1893, 88) which may be contemporary long cist burials, the later attribution of the well to a Christian saint and the continued religious importance of the site is demonstrated by remains of Class III sculpture (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 137–42). The site also continues to be used to celebrate a midwinter fire festival (Ritchie 1989, 15) which may hint at ritual continuity. Renfrew cautions that only a few categories will be fulfilled on a single site and says that his categories are not a check list and should not be used to create scores. However, the more indicators the stronger the inference and given the widespread nineteenth century destruction at Burghead the evidence is impressive. The bull plaques constitute all or part of the evidence in three categories (4, 7, 8) and the 'well' five (2, 5, 6, 12, 16) whilst other remains contribute to nine (1, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). This shows that no one type of material constitutes all of the evidence for cult at Burghead which strengthens the argument. If we accept that the evidence does support the idea of a bull cult can we say anything more about it?

The large fortifications, finds of weaponry and an Anglo-Saxon blast horn all suggest that Burghead is an important military site, so the bull cult is probably military as well. In particular the early report of battle-axes is interesting as these do not seem to have played much of a rôle in actual warfare (Laing and Laing 1984, 282). Axes are the most common items wielded by a group of figures on Pictish stones with animal or bird heads such as at Papil, West Burra,

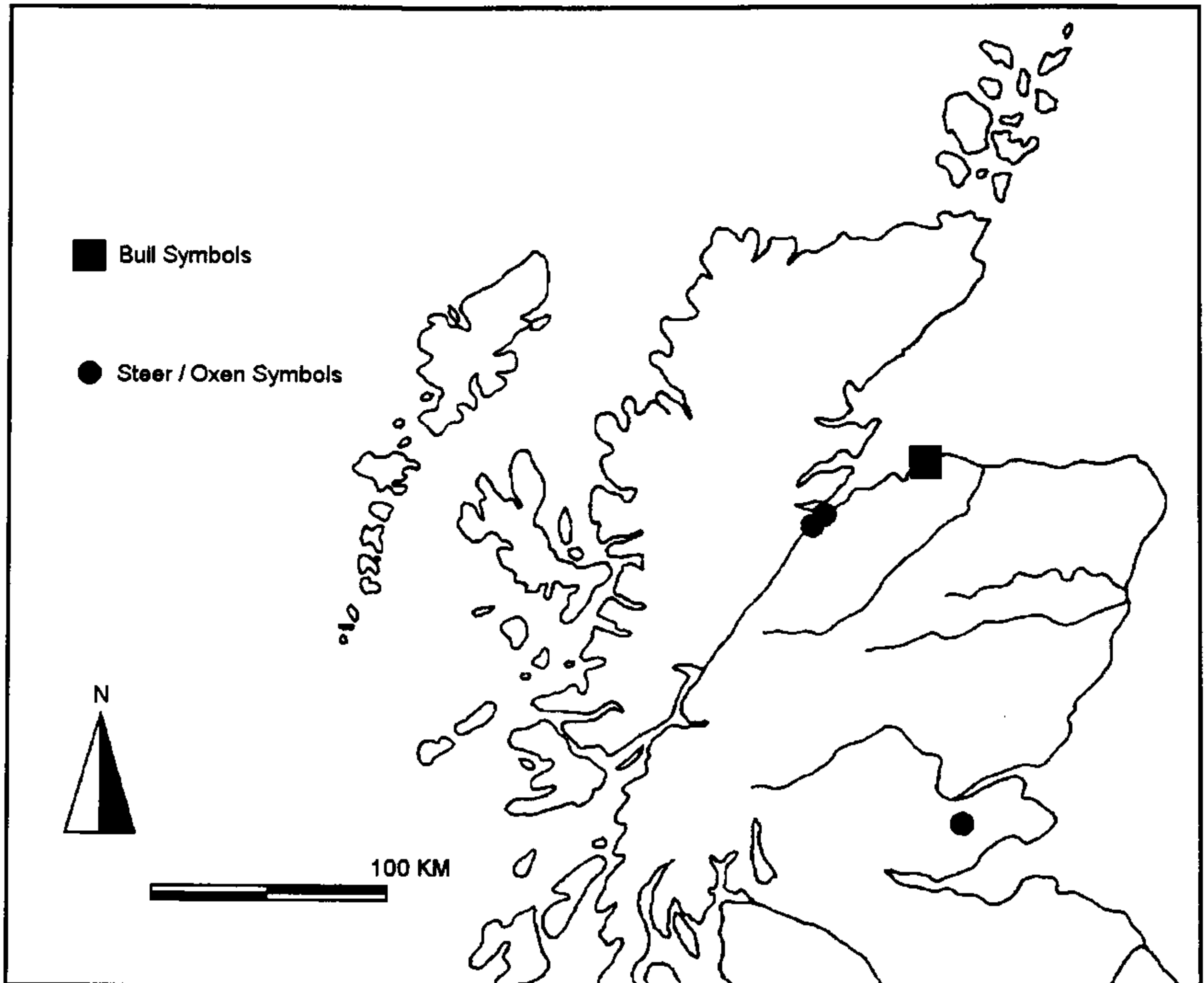
Shetland (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 10–15), Rossie Priory, Perthshire (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 306–08) and a recently discovered stone at Mail, Cunningsburgh, Shetland (Robertson 1992). Animal or bird headed figures may well be linked to pagan religion and their use of axes suggests that these had a symbolic ritual rôle. Additionally a bronze spear head (Abercromby 1907, 203) is likely to have been a symbolic rather than practical weapon and could even have been an antique. Certainly the bull with its connotations of strength, power, ferocity and virility would be an appropriate symbol for such a cult. Bull [*tarw*] symbolism is certainly common in the contemporary Gododdin poem, warriors are described as the bull of an army [*tarw byddin* A.XXX, A.LXXIV], bull of combat [*tarw trin* A.XXXVIII, A.XXXIX, B.LXXV] and heroic bull [*camhwrog darw* Gorchan of Tudfwlch] (Jarman 1988). Welsh triads describe prominent warriors as bull protectors [*Tharw Catuc*, triad 6] or bull chieftains [*Tharw Vnben*, triad 7] (Bromwich 1961, 11–13).



Plan of Burghead showing ramparts and well (© C Cessford)

Bulls also occur on Class II and Class III stones (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part II, 410) and some of these may shed light on the cult. There are depictions of pairs of bulls butting each other at Shandwick, Easter Ross (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 68–73) and on Meigle 12, Perthshire (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 333–34) and there is a bull fighting a mythical beast with large claws on the Cossans stone, Angus (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 216–

18). This emphasis on bulls fighting supports the idea of the bull being a symbol for a military cult and the Cossans stone, Angus, may reflect some pagan myth. St Vigeans 7, Angus, depicts a man kneeling in front of a bull pointing a rod like object at its neck (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 268–69). This may well be a bull sacrifice with pagan connotations (Hicks 1993, 154).



Map showing distribution of Bull amd Steer/Oxen symbols

Bull symbolism must surely be related to bulls in the real world, unfortunately it is difficult to assess this. They are difficult to identify archaeologically through bull horn cores are distinguishable and one was found at Dinas Powys (Alcock 1987, 80). The *Crith Gablach,* a contemporary law code from Ireland states that a freeman farmer must possess twenty cows, six oxen and two bulls (Alcock 1987, 78) which suggests that whilst they were less common than cows and oxen they were probably quite frequent.

If Burghead was the centre of a military bull cult what of the other carvings? The carvings from the Ness Valley and East Lomond actually depict castrated steers or oxen as is made clear by

their lack of secondary sexual organs, less heavy bodies, longer limbs and the shape of their horns (Alcock 1993, 230). Burghead's promontory location implies a naval rôle and Inverness, Kingsmill and East Lomond would have been within easy reach of Burghead by sea. The location of the East Lomond slab inside the fort suggests a military context. Could the plaques depicting steers/oxen have been erected by victorious members of a bull cult and forced upon their defeated enemies? Certainly a bull—castrated steer dichotomy could have been used to symbolise victory and defeat or submission. This is supported by the fact that none of the three steer/oxen plaques were in their original contexts. The East Lomond stone was lying on the ground when discovered, the Kingsmill plaque was used as a stepping stone to a cowbyre and the Inverness stone was built into a dyke. If these slabs were forced onto defeated groups by a victorious bull cult they were undoubtedly torn down as soon as the dominance of the bull cult ended in an area which would explain why none were found in their original contexts. Could there be many more steer/oxen slabs disposed of when the bull cult lost its power which await rediscovery? The two plaques from the Ness Valley come from positions between the end of Loch Ness and the Beauly Firth which would undoubtedly have been an important strategic location for anyone who lived at Burghead. East Lomond Hill may have been a centre of the Pictish kingdom of Fife or could be linked to the seventh century Northumbrian advance up the east coast. If steers/oxen symbolised defeat then the bulls at Burghead probably symbolised victory. The thirty odd bull carvings on the wall of the inner ward may each have been memorials to individual victories won by the forces of the cult.

The steer/oxen plaques from the Ness valley take us into the geographical area of the historical king Bridei whose contacts with St Columba provide the best documentary evidence for Pictish paganism. The Picts are described as pagan (Anderson 1991, II.27, II.33) and Pictish magicians [*magi*] are mentioned including Bridei's foster-father Broichan and a group of magicians at Bridei's fortress in the Ness valley (Anderson 1991, II.3–34, II.37). We are told of a well in Pictland which was supposedly venerated as a god and which the Picts drank from and washed their hands and feet in (Anderson 1991, II.11). It is tempting to imagine that the 'well' at Burghead fulfilled a similar rôle.

The Picts are not the only group in northern Britain to have such cults. Bede quotes from a letter from Pope Gregory to Abbot Melitus which mentions the local practice of slaughtering many cattle as sacrifices to devils (Colgrave and Mynors 1991, I.30). One centre of such activity is known at Yeavering (Hope-Taylor 1977). There seems to have been a pagan temple where cattle skulls were stacked in a pit inside the door [building D2], an associated kitchen building and butchery area [building D3] and a linear feature where refuse from building D2 was discarded [the Black Ditch]. Would modern large scale excavations at Burghead produce comparable results? Certainly the buildings and refuse heaps known from nineteenth century excavations give rise to optimism if any undisturbed areas could be located.

One of the strong points of Renfrew's system is that it can be applied to a wide range of sites. It could be used to look at a variety of Pictish sites. One likely candidate is Sculptor's Cave, Covesea (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 129–31; Benton 1931; Laing and Laing 1993, 107–08):

(1) Location – in a cave.

(5) Public display of hidden mysteries – the cave location suggests hidden mysteries.

(12) Human sacrifice – numerous human bones with evidence that nine individuals had been decapitated (Benton 1931, 206–07). These decapitations may be related to similar practices in fourth century Roman Britain (Philpott 1991, 77–89).

(14) Votive offerings – numerous finds of Roman material (Benton 1931, 191–203) many of which are unlikely to have been used in a cave such as nail cleaners and tweezers (Benton 1931, 205).

(15) Wealthy offerings – the Roman material mentioned above.

It would be tempting to interpret all cave sites as ritual, as they automatically qualify in Renfrew's category 1, however, research on Roman Britain shows that a wide range of activities took place in caves and that ritual use was rare (Brannigan and Dearne 1992). The supporting evidence of Roman material and decapitations from Sculptor's Cave means that the location is only one factor in the argument and there is a strong case for interpreting it as a cult site.

Another relevant site is the Dunnicaer sea-stack off the Kincardineshire coast which has produced the largest collection of plaques with symbols after Burghead (Alcock and Alcock 1992, 278–82; Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 200–01). Five plaques with a variety of rather atypical symbols were recovered and there may originally have been more. The plaques seem to have been built into a low wall on top of the stack. The site is very inaccessible and all the evidence suggests that it was separated from the mainland long before the Pictish period. This inaccessibility makes Dunnicaer completely impractical except as a cult centre where inaccessibility could be a virtue (Alcock and Alcock 1992, 281). Applying Renfrew's system we have evidence of cult in the form of:

(1) Location – on a sea-stack.

(2) Public display and hidden mysteries – the location on a sea-stack suggests hidden mysteries.

(9) Symbols relate to those in funerary rituals – if we accept that Class I stones commemorate dead individuals then the use or similar but distinctly atypical symbols at Dunnicaer suggests some relationship to funerary rights.

(16) Great investment of wealth in structures – the construction of even a low wall in such a location would have required considerable effort.

The main evidence, however, must be the location which makes any other use of the site apart from as a cult centre highly implausible. At Dunnicaer we have an exposed coastal site with symbols on the stone plaques set into stone walls which acted as a cult centre, parallels with Burghead are obvious which strengthens the case for Burghead also being a cult centre.

The evidence from Burghead is compatible with a military bull cult which may have won victories near Inverness and in Fife. The old name of Dunnet Head is *Tarvedunum* which means Bull's Fort (Watson 1926, 36), was this also a centre of a bull cult? There is also

Duntarvie in Lothian and several other bull place-names in Scotland (Watson 1926, 36, 147). The bull is a unique symbol and does not fit in to general explanations, it may however cast some light upon the boar symbol which also tends to occur in isolation. Many of the boars such as the fragment from Clunes Farm (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 97–98), the complete boar with mirror-case symbol from Knocknagael, Inverness (Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 103–05) and the rather dubious animal from Essich House, Inverness (RCAHMS 1994, 15) come from the same area of the Ness valley as the steers/oxen while another boar is carved at the Dalriadic fort of Dunadd. The boar from Dunadd is usually taken to mark the Pictish victory of Oengus in the eighth century, why then was it not obliterated when the Scots regained control of Dunadd (Alcock 1981, 167)? The boar represents some form of cultural interaction that made it acceptable to display a Pictish symbol in a Scottish context (Lane 1984, 56). Given the similar distribution of steers and boars in the Ness Valley they may be linked to the bull cult, might the boar have been the symbol for a military alliance? An alliance between Burghead and the area of the Ness valley is plausible, in which case the steer/oxen symbols are either of slightly different date or commemorate battles fought between the combined forces of Burghead and the Ness valley against a third invading group. An alliance between Picts of the bull cult and the Dalriadic Scots, perhaps against the Northumbrian Angles, is also possible and would explain why the symbol was not destroyed. We thus have a suggested interpretation for three symbols, though the evidence for the boar is less compelling:

Bull = Victory **Steer/Oxen = Defeat** **Boar = Alliance(?)**

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Statistics and the Pictish Symbols

Craig Cessford

Introduction

Most studies of the Pictish symbols concentrate on art-historical aspects. While these studies are perfectly valid, alternative approaches are also interesting because of their relative rarity. Two recent works by Elizabeth Alcock and Ross Samson applying statistical methods to Class I stones are significant contributions to our understanding of the stones.

Elizabeth Alcock's paper, *Pictish Stones Class I: Where and How?* (1989) takes a geographical approach. It looks at the distribution of Class I stones and examines their relationship to natural features such as height above sea level, distance from the coast, the soil quality and to man-made features such as churches or cairns. It also considers the distribution of various types of symbol, their relationship to one another and their relative positions on individual stones.

Ross Samson's paper, *The Reinterpretation of the Pictish Symbols* (1992), examines the social and semantic meaning of the symbols and by comparing them to Welsh, Irish and Germanic evidence suggests that individual symbols are 'themes'. Two 'themes' or symbols made up a personal name, with the mirror and comb symbolising 'female'. Class I stones are therefore interpreted as memorials which give the name and sex of an individual.

Both Studies

Whilst both articles are broadly convincing and deserve the attention of all those interested in the Pictish symbols, there are a number of problems with their methodologies. The following comments are focussed upon these problems. The most basic question is whether there are enough Class I stones to apply statistical methods? Alcock used 165 stones (p.3), though her later sections use smaller groups (p.9). Samson's work is based on 368 individual known symbols and 172 discrete units (pp.45, 49). Whilst there is no hard and fast cut off point below which statistics cannot be applied, and we are of course forced to work with the corpus available, its small size makes all conclusions questionable. Potentially it only requires a relatively small number of new stones to affect results drastically. Alcock acknowledges this, stating that 'The number ... is frequently so small that the percentages are used to give a general comparison rather than an exact one.' She continues that 'Sophisticated statistical techniques seem inappropriate – a sledge-hammer to crack not a nut but a pip' (p.1). Elsewhere she admits that for one group of maps and tables 'the numbers involved in almost all cases are too small for the results to carry much weight' (p.11). If the sample size is too

small for exact comparisons it is difficult to see how it is valid for general ones and it is equally hard to accept that it can invalidate sophisticated statistical techniques but not simple ones.

Both studies ignore symbols on pieces of metalwork, small slabs, pebbles and cave walls (Alcock, p.1; Samson, p.36). This is understandable, especially in the case of Alcock's study where geographical location is paramount and most of the excluded pieces are highly portable, though other studies have managed to include the symbols that Alcock and Samson exclude (e.g. Thomas 1963, 43–48). Alcock's position is however rather inconsistent as the paving slab and bone pin from Pool are used (p.11, Map 6A) which disguises what Alcock herself describes as a 'most conspicuous gap'. The bone pin in particular is definitely a 'small moveable object' (Alcock, p.1) that should have been excluded, and the paving slab should surely be classed with the plaques from Burghead that are omitted . This gap in the distribution map needs explanation rather than disguising with material which would normally have been excluded from the study. If the Burghead slabs are excluded why are those from Dinnacair included (Alcock, pp.3, 7) when they are of similar size? Neither article attempts to re-integrate the excluded symbols into their conclusions. The use of the same symbols on Class I stones and in other contexts such as on metalwork implies some form of relationship – otherwise different symbols would presumably have been required. If we accept Samson's argument that pairs of symbols represent personal names then surely the symbols on pieces of metalwork are also names. These names on metalwork objects are unlikely to be memorials to the dead but must be the names of their living wearers. If true, then might not the symbols on some or all of the Class I stones be names of the living rather than dead individuals? Any attempt to understand the Pictish symbols must include those symbols which occur in contexts other than Class I or Class II stones. Given the exclusion of so many symbols the inclusion of the Borthwick Mains salmon (Alcock, Maps 1, 8, 9B), which was deliberately omitted from the RCAHMS handlist (1985, 2), is difficult to understand.

Any attempt to apply statistics requires firm classification and exact numbers. Both authors however admit that there are cases when they were not sure how to categorise a symbol (Samson, p.37) or even whether to include it in the study or not (Alcock, p.1). Dividing the Pictish symbols into rigid groups is fraught with difficulties and there is room for considerable disagreement which must surely weaken any statistical results based upon rather arbitrary nineteenth and twentieth century notions of classification.

Elizabeth Alcock

A geographical treatment such as Alcock's is forced to assume that the first documentary record of the position of a stone is identical with where it was originally located. This is unlikely to be true of those built into churchyard walls (p.9) or several others such as the one built into a bridge in Princess Street Gardens, Edinburgh. Alcock argues that 'their weight and

size make it unlikely that they have been moved any distance' (p.9). I am not so sure as there are various mechanisms such as looting as victory trophies, antiquarian interest or even ships' ballast which could easily have moved stones considerable distances prior to the earliest documentary record of their positions.

Alcock's consideration of location is largely based upon the division of the stones into seven geographical regions refered to as A to G (Map 1). These boundaries were in most cases 'formed by natural features' and 'immediately self evident' (p.3). The only problem admitted is that in a few cases a boundary may have been on either side of a particular stone (p.3). The solution to this was to use modern district boundaries, a regrettable though understandable expedient. Scotland is in fact a land teeming with natural features that could be used as boundaries and it is possible to select a completely different set. For example, Alcock's group D is centred on the River Spey but there is no reason why the river itself should not have been used as a boundary. Why not use the Moray Firth or the River Dee as well? The list of possibilities is endless. Alcock's sevenfold division immediately calls to mind the seven provincies of *De Situ Albanie* (Henderson 1967, 35–37; Wainwright 1955, 46–47, Map 1B). In some cases her regions coincide with those of this document but in others they do not. This is not to argue that this later document is necessarily reliable but it could have provided a less arbitrary framework. The imposition of fixed boundaries implies a static situation throughout the entire period of the erection of Class I stones – a rather unlikely scenario in a period marked by its fluid nature.

In some cases it is not clear that Alcock is looking at the correct geographical factor. For example, the consideration of the distance of stones from the coast (p.7, Table 3) does not mention the overwhelmingly coastal distribution of archaeological evidence for the occupation of forts during this period (Alcock and Alcock 1990, 119–20). Both Pictish stones and occupied forts become more coastal north of the Highland line – is what is being demonstrated a coastal distribution of the stones, or a distribution linked to occupied forts?

Ross Samson

One of the main strands of Samson's argument is his comparison of the frequency of Pictish symbols with Welsh and Irish data (Figs.5–7 and p.49). The Welsh names come from a broadly comparable source, Nash-Williams' corpus of Welsh stones (1950), but the Irish names are derived from a wide variety of different, mainly documentary, sources which cover a period (AD 400–1100) much longer than the length of time over which Class I stones were erected. If names changed over time with new names evolving or being introduced, quite likely, and the range of Irish sources represents a wider cross-section of society than the Pictish symbols, also quite likely, then the frequencies of the two groups are not really comparable.

Samson assumes that there are no significant regional variations and discounts the idea that more work needs to be done on distribution patterns before he can reject geographical patterning (pp.60–61, note 75). Whilst Alcock's study does not contradict, Samson's conclusions the maps of the most common symbols (Maps 5, 6A, 6B and 7) suggest that his total rejection of geographical patterning and the need for work on this topic was a touch premature. Also Alcock's demonstration of how frequently mirrors and combs occur by themselves rather than in combination (Map 7) and the apposite reminder that combs need not be associated with women (p.13) cast doubt on Samson's acceptance of the theory that the mirror and comb symbol designates a woman.

Conclusion

The application of quantitative statistical methods to archaeological data is always difficult because the material is never complete and is usually biased. Statistics and Pictish symbols do not have an entirely happy history – for example, the application of Thiessen polygons and other methods by Cottam and Small (1974) has been comprehensively discredited (e.g. Alcock 1980, 65), which should serve as a warning against applying such techniques without careful consideration. Alcock's and Samson's studies suffer from some methodological problems which have been discussed. However, none of these problems are important enough to discredit the studies' overall conclusions.

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The Equestrian Motif in the Early Medieval Pictish Sculpture at Meigle, Perthshire

Ann Carrington

Nowhere else in Early Medieval Britain do processions of horsemen appear with such frequency and visual richness as in Pictish sculpture. Most recently Leslie Alcock has shown the social importance of horsemen in Pictish sculpture and described the types of gaits horses are depicted in (1993). Isabel Henderson has briefly considered the importance of the horseman as part of Pictish David imagery (1982; 1986). However, the Pictish equestrian motif has not been studied on its own and deserves the concentration of a study in its own right. The corpus of monuments at Meigle includes some of the finest examples of the Pictish equestrian motif. The purpose of this paper is to heighten the understanding of this motif with particular reference to the examples at Meigle. In our approach we shall consider the universally accepted Christian symbolism and secular imagery that might be accorded to the motif.

The Meigle monuments include Class II and III examples according to the *ECMS* classification. Class II is generally attributed to the 8th century ending with the end of Pictish independence in the mid-9th century. A number of Meigle monuments do not have symbols and are classified as Class III. This may be a result of the integration of Picts and Scots under Kenneth Mac Alpin in the mid-9th century (Anderson 1980, 194). The corpus of monuments at Meigle indicates that a centre of significant power and influence existed at the site from at least the 8th century (RCAHMS 1994, 91). That Meigle was an ecclesiastical site is suggested by architectural fragments found with the sculptured stones; and a reference to Thana, son of Dudabrach, a scribe at Meigle *c.*840 (Anderson 1922, 267). Meigle may have been an important royal centre having powerful royal patrons. Dynastic interests often associated themselves with a church or ecclesiastical centre (e.g. the church and palace at Forteviot) where they paid for burial and commissioned artwork (Alcock 1982, 211–39; Davies 1994, 98–99). The sculpture at Meigle and other centres such as Dunkeld indicates that SE Perth was a wealthy and important part of Pictland (RCAHMS 1994, 88–93).

The Equestrian Motif in Pictish Sculpture

Many of the examples of the Pictish equestrian motif are found in Perthshire (e.g. Dunkeld 1 & 2, St Madoes, Rossie Priory) and Angus (e.g. Aberlemno 2 & 3, Cossans). The equestrian motif shows a remarkable degree of stylisation. The term 'stylisation' indicates the stereotyped character of the motif. It indicates a symbolic function made at once recognisable through the repetition of form, i.e., the features that enable the motif to be grouped according to type. The

equestrian motif has a mutual repertoire, although each monument is individual in its composition, that is repeated to express an iconographical message whether Christian, secular or both.

The development of the Pictish equestrian motif follows a general pattern. The earlier monuments exhibit the finer examples of the motif. The features which characterise the motif then gradually 'degenerate' from an elegant equine form (e.g. Aberlemno 3, Meigle 1) becoming exaggerated or misunderstood in later examples whether through distance, time, or copying of models. Typically the equestrian becomes heavier and more awkward, the horse's head becomes disproportionately large and the leg action misunderstood (Henderson 1978, 55). Degeneration of the formulaic equestrian form is most typically an indicator of copying from a model. The repetition of a stereotyped form also makes it easier for an artist to create an easily recognisable and identifiable motif — an important factor for an image carrying specific iconographical content and simple for an artist to repeat again quickly.

The equestrian appears as a motif on its own, as part of a procession, or hunt made up of other equestrian figures in Pictish sculpture. The motif of the horseman or cavalcade at Meigle does not include any animals of the hunt, although hounds may accompany horsemen in some examples (e.g. Meigle 2). The rider may, or may not, be armed — a feature made problematic by weathering of the monuments. Riders on Meigle 1, 2, 3, 5 and 11 all wear swords in scabbards, while on Meigle 6, the horseman carries a round shield, spear, and sheathed sword.

The equestrian motif can either occur singly or in groups at Meigle. I have termed cavalcades of two or more horsemen 'processions'. This series of equestrian processions consists of two or more horsemen travelling together. Hounds are also part of these compositions as on Meigle 1, 2, 6, 11 and 26. The equestrian procession is made up of a stereotyped equestrian motif. The form is simply repeated with little variation to create a composition. Variation in size, clothing, and horse trappings may serve to indicate the relative status of the riders in a procession and differentiate them from their companions.

The equestrian motifs in Pictish sculpture are all of a formulaic and stereotyped character, having the same features in one form or another. The equestrian motif is drawn to a formula. Generally all Pictish horsemen are of the same basic type. The horse's neck is arched; the head is small, neat, and wedge-shaped with a dished profile tapering into the muzzle which expands slightly in the nostril and mouth area; and small triangular pricked ears. The legs are long and slender with knee, hock, and fetlock joints well-defined and small hooves. Where the eyes are still distinguishable they are usually almond-shaped. In some cases the mane is also indicated. Degeneration of form is indicated by a thin neck, overly large head, two ears depicted in a V-shape, and misunderstood leg action of the horse (e.g. Meigle 3 and 6). The rider is often too large for his mount.

The horse at Meigle is depicted in a single gait — a high-stepping 'trot' (Alcock 1993, 231). The 'trot' is the most common and characteristic pace of the Pictish horse[1]. It is characterised by a high leg action with the diagonally opposite fore and hind legs lifted giving the sense of forward motion. This is not a natural gait. The high leg action has more in common with the triumphal Roman equestrian.

The Pictish equestrian is not, as often described, drawn in a *naturalistic* or a *realistic* manner. It is of an *abstract* or *manneristic* form as is characteristic of Early Medieval art in general. While the Pictish sculptor did manage to understand the natural placement of the legs of a horse in movement[2], this is by no means makes the horse a feature of the supposed *naturalism* of Pictish sculptural motifs. The Pictish horseman is abstract — stereotyped and drawn to a formula. The horse's high leg action is not realistic, but either indicative of a gait developed by man to which a horse is trained or, (more likely) of the artistic models that inspired and influenced the form of the Pictish equestrian. The Pictish horseman is an artistic motif that has a symbolic purpose. The stereotyped nature of the motif suggests that it is an image of iconographical significance.

The tails of the Meigle horses can either be long and down-falling, wavy, or docked. Horses with docked tails appear on examples such as Meigle 2, 5 and 11 as well as other Perthshire monuments like Rossie Priory and St Madoes. Docked tails are generally those that have been cut at a point on the tail bone about half way between the hock and the croup. Some of those termed docked appear to be trimmed just above the hock rather than docked in the accepted sense. Wavy tails appear on the horses of Meigle 1, 2 and 26. Alcock suggests that these tails are bound with rings at intervals to give them a wavy appearance (Alcock 1993, 232). Generally, most Pictish horses have long, straight tails as in Meigle 1, 2 and 3.

Horses, especially for riding, hunting, and warfare are a major theme of Pictish cross slabs suggesting that they were also a major interest of their patrons (Alcock 1993, 231). The warrior class that owned horses is represented by the motif of the horseman. The rider at Meigle is also of a characteristic type — seated just behind the horse's withers, leg bent slightly at the knee, and his foot pointing between the forelegs of his mount. Isabel Henderson was among the first to note these features characterising the rider. She describes the typical Pictish rider as being in 'strict profile' with long hair, a prominent nose and a pointed or bearded chin (1982, 94–95). The hair is often in a pony-tail at the nape of the horseman's neck. Clothing, weapons, and horse trappings vary between the monuments. Generally, Pictish horsemen wear a short knee-length tunic and breeches and carry a spear, small round shield, and sheathed sword.

Equestrian processions are found in two forms at Meigle. The first type is a cavalcade of horsemen following a leading rider, one behind the other. These processions are either arranged horizontally (Meigle 11 and 26) or diagonally (Meigle 1 and 4). On Meigle 26 there is a variation of this basic type as three horsemen in the procession are depicted riding abreast.

This overlapping is also found on Meigle 2 as well as Fowlis Wester, Perthshire and Hilton of Cadboll, Ross and Cromarty. The second type of procession is that represented by Meigle 2 which is triangular in composition. The large uppermost horseman is placed in a central position above the smaller horsemen below him. These types of procession are made up of variations upon the placement of single horsemen. In other words, the formula is simply repeated to form a series of equestrian figures which make up a procession. This suggests that the horsemen were not randomly placed but carefully arranged.

Origins of the Motif

The imagery of status and sovereignty is a central concept to our discussion of the models and forms of the Pictish equestrian motif at Meigle and elsewhere in Pictland. The equestrian motif in Pictish sculpture appears to be descended from late Roman tradition. The image of the triumphant ruler on horseback is likely to be the ultimate model behind the equestrian motif of the Early Medieval period. The Pictish equestrian motif appears to be an expression of ideals of kingship, particularly Christian kingship.

The equestrian motif has a multi-layered iconography. That these huntsmen are symbolic is emphasised by their proximity to the cross on Pictish monuments. Horsemen are often placed alongside or even inside the cross that predominates cross slab sculpture, for example at Rossie Priory. The symbols accompanying many Pictish equestrian motifs may have been intended to express ideas about status, rank, occupation, land rights, or even tribal lineage[3].

The full-face portrait with wavy hair and strong brow-line, of the emperor on horseback is a common element of Sassanian and Late Antique silver plates. The emperor figure is often nimbused and diademed as a mark of his authority as seen on the Barberini diptych and Kertch dish (Biddle 1984, 288). At Meigle the horsemen are depicted wearing military attire and are in profile, but appear to have the strong browline typical of Late Antique examples. The wavy hair and browline are features of the classicising St Andrews 'sarcophagus' equestrian.

On Pictish examples the rider generally has long hair and a beard, while the Imperial emperor has short hair and is clean-shaven. The long hair may be a result of native preference. The St Andrews horseman is bearded as is Marcus Aurelius of the famous equestrian statue in Rome. The wavy or curly hair of many classical ruler-images is also found at Kirriemuir, on the Dupplin Cross, and Forteviot 4. The long hair and beard suggests the maturity of the rider and his position of societal responsibility.

In form the Pictish equestrian more closely recalls Carolingian representations whose artistic inspiration and models came from Rome. They are ultimately of the oriental type of Late Antique or Byzantine models. Equestrians of the profile and 'trotting' type most likely derive

from representations of the Emperor Constantine, e.g. a 9th century statuette of Charlemagne or one of his successors (in the Louvre, Paris). This figure presumably was based on the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, positioned in front of the Lateran in the Middle Ages,, falsely believed to be Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor. Such equestrian statues were well-known from travellers' reports of visits to Rome, such as Gregorius's *Marvels of Rome* (13th century, MS E IV 96, St Catherine's College, Cambridge) and other such descriptions[4]. Equestrian statues and other 'marvels' were recorded from an early period, suggesting that models were available through literary description, sketches, or even the oral descriptions of those returning to Britain from abroad.

These Late Antique examples may have provided the influence for the triumphant equestrian developed in Pictland. Such models were probably transmitted via contacts with Carolingian courts preoccupied with images of Christian kingship. The equestrian illustrates a prerogative of political power — the horse — in both Roman Imperial and Medieval art. The Imperial triumphal model depicting the defeat of enemies or of mounted generals shown in a victorious pose riding over subdued barbarians were adopted into the Christian repertoire to illustrate the aspect of victory. Examples such as the 'tondo' on the Arch of Constantine in Rome (AD 117–138), portraying a boar hunt, combines the military and triumphal aspects of a general on horseback. A relief panel of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180) shows the emperor receiving defeated barbarians mounted upon a horse posed in a similar way to Pictish examples. The emperor mounted on a horse is physically higher than the men on foot. In this manner he is placed above them in status and in triumph. This is the likely symbolic purpose of equestrian figures in Pictish sculpture.

On the Kertch silver dish (4th century) an equestrian portrait of Constantius II (337-361) depicts him as a Christian emperor, his shield emblazoned with the *Chi-Rho* monogram (Toynbee 1986, 16, pl. 14). As is characteristic, the horse is in a rearing pose, the rider's leg falling behind its forelegs. Horses and riders posed in a similar manner are paralleled in Pictish sculpture such as Kirriemuir 2, Aberlemno 2 and the Rossie Priory cross slabs. While the horse may be posed differently this shows a precedent for connecting the motif with Christian symbolism. The triumphal equestrian motif in its general presentation of an equestrian ruler provides a source from which Insular sculptors may have drawn inspiration.

Equestrian representations from Roman Britain provide a formally possible source for the Insular equestrian image. At the very least it establishes a tradition of the equestrian image in Britain, suggesting that its attendant symbolism and image were familiar from an early period. Examples from Roman Britain include stone tomb reliefs for auxiliary cavalrymen showing horsemen riding over an enemy such as at Stanwix, Cumberland and Hexham Abbey (Toynbee 1964, pl. xlvii b, 189–94). Roman distance slabs from the Antonine Wall may have influenced the form, content, and design of Pictish sculpture (Henderson 1990, 9), e.g. the cavalryman riding over a native warrior on the Bridgeness distance slab (2nd century AD) (Keppie 1979,

10, pl. 1). A horseman riding over a fallen enemy is found at a later date (*c.*700) on the Sutton Hoo helmet (Bruce-Mitford 1974, pl.139). Small Roman votive bronze equestrian figures have also been found in Britain (Taylor 1963, 264–68). These are depicted in a triumphant pose with the rider as a warrior similar to the Pictish equestrian. Horsemen of this type are also found in Gallo-Roman contexts, such as at Weisbaden (Benoit 1950, 55).

More immediate sources of models which are successors to this classical tradition are found in Carolingian and Merovingian artwork, roughly contemporary to the period when horsemen began to appear in Pictish sculpture. Charlemagne and his successors saw their empire as the legitimate successor to the Roman one. Identification with ideal rulers such as Constantine, first Christian Roman emperor, made the equestrian motif a potent icon (Bullough 1975, 240).[5]

The *Utrecht Psalter* (830) provides a possible disseminator of equestrian images derived from late classical and Imperial tradition. The equestrian image appears frequently as part of the illustrations accompanying the psalter text such as on fol.143v. Many of the horses are posed in a similar stylised fashion to Pictish horses in a trot or walk. However, the leg action is different with both legs on the same side lifted. The *Utrecht* horses share the common Pictish features of a dished profile, elegant head with high carriage, arched neck and long slender legs. Some even have short or docked tails as at Meigle. The horsemen are seated in a different position more reminiscent of their classical models — the leg of the rider falling behind the horse's forelegs. The court school at Rheims would have offered models upon which the Psalter was based, as well as models derived from the classical tradition that may have influenced Pictish sculptural motifs.

The equestrian appears extremely rarely in Insular Celtic manuscripts, occurring more often in Carolingian and English sources. The *Book of Kells* (Dublin, Trinity College MS 58 (A.I.6), 8th or early 9th century) has two equestrian figures as part of its incidental decoration. These are found on fol.89r. and fol.255v. (Fox 1990, 236, 238). The Kells horsemen are very close to the Pictish equestrian motif. The horses are of the same general type, however the leg action is different (the fol.89r. horse is walking and fol.255v. horse's legs are interlaced to fit between the lines of text). The *Kells* horsemen are also much more awkward than the Pictish examples sitting too low to be on the horse's back.

These features are also typical of roughly contemporary Irish High Cross equestrian motifs (8th to 12th century). This suggests that the Pictish equestrian served as a model for Irish examples, or that similar models were shared. The Irish High Cross equestrian has the same characteristic features as the Pictish motif, as seen on the Market Cross, Kells.

Mercian and Pictish equestrian motifs seem to share the same models or influences. Perhaps Mercia was a region from whence such impulses reached Pictland. Mercian sculpture does not appear until after the mid-8th century or the end of Offa's reign (747–796) (Cramp 1977, 194), roughly the same period when the equestrian motif began to appear in Early Medieval

Pictish sculpture. This suggests that throughout the Insular milieu, the same sources and models were being taken artistic advantage of, influence passing into Britain from the Continent.

At Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire, a frieze of horsemen is part of the architectural sculpture at the church of St Mary and St Hardulph and appears to be of Anglo-Saxon origin (early 9th century) (Cramp 1977, 207; Jewell 1986, 95). Another fine example of the Mercian equestrian motif is found on the Repton Stone which has been studied in depth by Martin Biddle. Biddle suggests that the Repton horseman reflects Late Antique art and ideas, Celtic style, Germanic and ecclesiastical influences that would have been present in 8th century Mercia (1984, 233–92). The rider's countenance faces the viewer frontally while his torso turns at a three-quarter view much like the ruler-images on Late Antique silver plates. He has a long drooping moustache, a feature found on later Pictish horsemen as at Dupplin and upon Irish sculpture such as the Cross of Muiredach. This element is also found on figures in the *Book of Kells* suggesting that it had become a general Hiberno-Saxon feature.

If we accept Biddle's date of the mid-8th century for the Repton horseman, this suggests that Pictish sculptors were receiving influence or even models from Mercian sources and shared in a common tradition derived from classical art. Isabel Henderson has examined the connection of Pictish and Mercian art at length in association with the David motifs in Pictish sculpture (1986, 87–123). This suggests a complex network of artistic influence and exchange. Models and influences did not travel just one way, but circulated throughout Early Medieval Britain, as common motifs were often chosen to express specific Christian and secular iconograhies. In other words, the development of the equestrian throughout Britain was a hybrid of models and influences characteristic of Insular art of that period.

The Equestrian Motif in Early Celtic Literature

Early Irish and Welsh literary sources may serve to illuminate the symbolism and rôle of the equestrian in Pictish sculpture. These sources demonstrate the social importance of horsemanship and horses within Insular Celtic culture of the Early Medieval period. They may also suggest what the processions of horsemen may indicate — use of cavalry, travel to battle, tour of royal domains. No extant sources contain anything of Pictish legend or saga, which makes the use of Celtic literary sources to understand Pictish sculpture problematic. However, that Pictish sculpture shares elements characteristic of Celtic art, like the equestrian motif, suggests that this literature may also have shared within Celtic tradition. The nature of Pictish literature will never be known with any certainty, but what glimpses there are suggest it would have been broadly comparable with contemporary Irish and Welsh literature in respect of themes, genres, and even some characters[6].

Early Irish sources concentrate for a large part on the horse in warfare. The horse is associated with the birth of heroes, the inauguration of kings, is the mount of warriors, and helper of saints such as *Dub Saiglenn* and *Líath Macha* who belonged to Cú Chulainn.. Descriptions of horse trappings and what qualities are admired in a horse are another feature of early literary sources[7].

The trappings of horses and horsemen are elaborately described in early Irish tradition. The sumptuous tack of a horseman is an important symbol of status and wealth. The dark and grey horses promised Eochu Bec in the *Táin Bó Dartada* appear richly caparisoned with bridles of gold and silver, silver bits, foot-chains of brass, and whips of white-bronze with ends of gold (Leahy 1906, 72–74; Windisch 1887, 189–91). In the Welsh *Mabinogi* tale of the *Dream of Rhonabwy* the luxurious trappings of the mounted warriors gathering for battle identifies what retinue they belong to and their relative status (Jones 1991, 139–49). Horses at Meigle and in Pictish sculpture in general are caparisoned with bridles, bits, reins, and saddle-blankets. These are the features most often described in the early literary sources in relation to horsemanship and status. On Meigle 1, 2 and 11 the saddle-blankets and other trappings are still visible as they are on other examples like Cossans, Kirriemuir 2 and the St Andrews sarcophagus.

That the early British people used cavalry is suggested by the equestrian processions in Pictish and Irish sculpture and in the early literary sources. Retinues of horsemen are a predominant feature of early North British elegiac poems of the *Goddodin* (text from the 9th or 10th century). The men of Catraeth are described as being in a battalion with a force of horses with dark blue armour, shields, spears, mail-coats and swords (Jackson 1969, 130, A.33). Individual warriors and heroes are described many times as mounted upon fine white steeds as they go into battle[8].

Horses are also used in warfare in Irish and Welsh sources. In an entry from the *Annals of Ulster* for AD 1131 the horsemen (*marcsluagh*) of Conchobor ua Briain and the men of Mumu battle against the horsemen of Connacht (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983, 578–79). In an Irish poem from the *Book of Leinster*, 'A grave marked with Ogam', the hero Cairbre fights from horseback on a mount described as good in the fray (Lehmann 1980, 202). Horses are also ridden in battle in the *Mabinogion* in the *Dream of Rhonabwy* and in *Pwyll.* Warfare on horseback in a Pictish context is illustrated on the reverse of the Aberlemno 2 cross slab.

Horsemanship was an integral part of a young nobleman's education. According to an early Irish law tract, the *Cáin Íarraith* (Law of the Fosterage Fee), the son of a king required a riding-horse and costly garments. He was to be taught board-games, horsemanship (*branniugecht*), swimming and marksmanship (Kelly 1988, 87). The sons of the noble ranks also were to learn horsemanship and be provided with horses while under fosterage. The sons of lower societal grades such as *féini*, were not taught horsemanship (AL ii, 161). In the *Sanas Cormaic* the prerequisites of a king's son are set out. Under the entry for *Orc treith* are listed *Eoenach oirc*

treith (a king's son's fair) which includes food, costly raiment, a horse, a chariot, and greyhounds (Stokes 1891, 174–75; Meyer 1912, 86–87).

Societal status is indicated by the quality of horse and trappings allowed to certain ranks in the early Irish law tract *Críth Gablach* (8th century) (Binchy 1941, 16; CIH 779.29). For example, a chief of *aire-déso* rank is allowed a riding or saddle horse (*eich slíasta*) becoming his status with a silver bridle and four horses with green bridles. Twelve bridle horses (*echsrían*), a golden bridle, and a silver bridle are required of a chief of *aire tuisi* rank. Those of lesser rank such as the *óg-aire* are allowed to own a horse for work or riding and the *bóaire* rank are allowed a saddle-horse, an enamelled bridle, and a work horse.

Horses are given as gifts between notables. In the *Life of St Maedoc* (?12th century) the king of Breifne bestows his raiment and horse upon Maedoc's community as part of his inauguration as king (Plummer 1922, Vol.I, 202–03). The horse and raiment serve as symbols of kingship, wealth and power. In the 10th century tale *Scélo Cano meic Gartnáin*, Ilann gives to the new lord Cano fifty dark-grey horses and harnesses (Dillon 1946, 62).

The supernatural nature of the horses in early Celtic tradition indicates the special significance accorded to horses in early Celtic societies. This is emphasised by remnants of horse worship found in tales of Macha, Rhiannon, and of Epona, and the association of the horse with the Otherworld. As we have seen the equestrian motif is associated with ideas of kingship, heroism and status. Horsemanship appears throughout early Celtic tradition as an appropriate and immediately recognisable symbol of social standing.

The Meigle Equestrian Processions

The beautifully conceived monuments of Meigle have some of the finest examples of equestrian imagery in all Pictland. The Meigle scenes are characterised by processions of horsemen. The horsemen on these slabs usually follow a lead rider whose status is indicated by his larger size. These stones include Meigle 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11 and 26.

On the reverse of Meigle 4 two horsemen travel on a diagonal up the slab in similar manner to those on Meigle 1. This feature along with the low flattened relief, rounded profiles, and the use of symbols in association with the riders, place these sculptures close together. The motifs on Meigle 4 are not as clearly divided into registers as those on Meigle 1. The placement of horsemen, symbols and beasts appears more crowded and confused, perhaps indicating that Meigle 4 is later than Meigle 1.

The horsemen decline in size with the sloping shape of the panel of the recumbent, Meigle 11. The first horseman is the largest of three riders suggesting his higher status. This arrangement also suggests movement. The low riding position of the horsemen and the exaggerated

proportions of the horses are very similar to the horsemen in the *Book of Kells*.[9] In this sense the horses are similar to those upon Irish crosses suggesting a late-9th century date,m such as at Bealin, Clonmacnois. Christian significance may be derived from a belief that recumbent slabs like this were grave covers or stones for Christian burials.

Meigle 4 (© JRF Burt)

On Meigle 2 the horsemen and hounds are placed in a spatial relationship. The hound in the foreground almost completely overlaps the background one. A further spatial relationship is created by placing riders abreast. The high relief of the figures completes this coherent suggestion of spatial depth. The device of overlapping is a sophisticated method of dealing with spatial relationships. This overlapping of horsemen has already been noted on Meigle 26.

The technique of Meigle 2 equestrian composition bears a resemblance to the Hilton of Cadboll cross slab (Radford 1942, 15). Both have the flattened high relief surface with rounded profiles and use the device of overlapping to indicate two or more figures in relief. In size and arrangement Meigle 2 is reminiscent of the Aberlemno 3 hunting scene (Stevenson 1971, 74). The equestrian scenes on both occupy a major allotment of space upon the slab surface and a branch-bearing centaur is found in the bottom third of the slab.

On Meigle 1, 2, 4, 11 and 26 hierarchic scaling of horsemen is a predominant compositional feature. Often a larger horseman is placed at the top central position (e.g. Meigle 2) or as the first in a cavalcade (e.g. Meigle 11). This is a visual method of representing regal, military or societal status of the horseman (Alcock 1993, 232). The upper horseman on Meigle 2 is undoubtedly the most important as he occupies the uppermost and central position in the scene. He is also the largest of the riders. This indicates the relative status of the horsemen. On Meigle 1 the leading rider is the largest, as on Meigle 4.

Horses are symbols of both status and wealth, not simply means of transport. A horseman is physically higher than a person on foot and is thus in a position of authority. Horses have to be specially bred, trained, equipped, fed and stabled. This is an expensive pastime and a clear statement of wealth and authority. Horsemen equipped with spears, shields and swords are demonstrating military power and their social position as warriors, nobles and protectors.

On Meigle 1 and 2 the foremost equestrian is accompanied by a winged figure. This can be interpreted as a winged Victory much like those that accompany the horsemen on the Kertch dish and Barberinin diptych. The Christian context of the equestrian procession of Meigle 1 is emphasised by the two-winged angel suspended above the first rider in the second register. Likewise, on Meigle 2 a four-winged angel accompanies the foremost horseman. In Psalm 75 (Psalm 76, fol.43v.) of the *Utrecht Psalter* three horsemen are depicted, one leading and two following, one seen just behind the other (Van der Horst 1984, 77–78). An angel flies like a Victory above the first horseman and two appear above his companions.

The *Daniel in the Lion's Den* motif below the equestrian procession on Meigle 2 may indicate a Christian interpretation of the horsemen and angel. The lion is a symbol of evil as it persecutes Daniel. Daniel is menaced by the lions of the wicked and is delivered by an angel of the Lord. *Daniel and the Lions* is a widespread theme in Early Medieval art. It is found in Irish High Cross sculture as one set of visual representations of the prayer *commendatio ordatio* which appears in the *Martyrology of Oengus* (*c.*800) and exhorts God for salvation.

Below the *Daniel* motif is a centaur carrying a branch. Henderson has linked this image and other fantastic beasts at Meigle, Aberlemno and Dunfallandy with Biblical allegories of Medieval bestiaries such as the *Physiologus* and the *Marvels of the East* (1967, 138). That the *Physiologus* allegories were known in North Britain is suggested by Bede's knowledge of them in his *De naturis bestiarum*. The *Physiologus* was an established source of Medieval Christian animal symbolism — centaur shows the dual nature of man. The earliest extant illustrated Latin manuscript of the text is the 9th century MS Codex 318, the 'Bern Physiologus'. *Physiologus* and bestiary legends are also found in Isidore of Seville's Book XII of his *Etymologiae*. In the *Bern Physiologus* in a chapter likely derived from Isidore's *Etymologiae*, the horse is described as high-spirited, being able to scent war, stirred by the sound of a trumpet for battle, are aroused by the voice in racing, exalted in victory, can attack enemy during battle, and that

certain horses grieve for the death of their masters by shedding tears. These are features that also are associated with the horse in early Celtic tradition. For example, Cú Chulainn's horse sheds tears when he is slain as does St Columba's horse upon his death. From this we can see that the horse is associated with ideals of war, fidelity, and victory.

The general Christian theme of the Meigle equestrians may be one of victory and triumph. This interpretation is reinforced in Meigle 1 and 2 by the presence of the angel. Henderson has interpreted the angel as a winged Victory on Meigle 2 of the type familiar from a Justinian soldus, recording an earthly victory alongside the eternal resurrection and salvation imagery of Daniel (1982, 103). This accords well with the derivation of the equestrian from Roman triumphal sculpture and reinforces the overall symbolic theme of victory — an earthly victory of the horsemen complements the spiritual victory implied by the cross on the front of many Meigle slabs as well as by scenes like that of Daniel on Meigle 2.

The horses and hounds serve as a visual display of wealth on the part of whoever the riders may be — powerful warriors and their retainers. Equestrian displays of wealth occur in early Irish tradition in which horses and sumptuoustrappings are gifts of otherworldly nature as discussed above. these descriptive passages are a verbal display of wealth and power as in *Tochmarc Étaíne*. In sculpture the horses and hounds send the same message visually.

The Meigle equestrian processions present mounted warriors, noblemen or kings as a symbol of wealth, political, and military power. These horsemen may also represent the protective obligations that the noble classes were expected to exercise over the lower levels of society. In early Irish and Welsh tales mounted warriors appear as protectors of their kingdoms as in *Fled Bricrenn, Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, and the *Gododdin*.. That kingship and war are associated with horsemen (e.g. the red horses of war in the *Táin Bó Cúailinge* and *Da Derga*) reinforces this interpretation.

The Single Equestrian at Meigle

Meigle 3, 5 and 6 all have a single equestrian motif on their reverse sides. The Meigle 6 horseman is accompanied by a hound. The motif on Meigle 3 is similar to those of Meigle 6, Gask and St Madoes. That the lower portion of Meigle 3 is missing suggests that at one time there may have been more elements to the equestrian scene, such as a hound. The single equestrian motif here refers to the horseman appearing alone and not part of a larger narrative composition such as a hunt scene (e.g. Nigg, St Andrews sarcophagus).

The isolation of the equestrian on the reverse of the cross slab suggests that it is a statement of power and victory linked to the triumphal symbolism of the cross on the front of the slab. The single equestrian motif may be a mark of a later date than the processions. Single horsemen at

Meigle and elsewhere are often of a degenerated form. The motif is found in 10th century Northumbrian sculpture as well as the Strathclyde sculpture of W Scotland showing Pictish influence, such as the 10th century monuments at Govan.

The single equestrian motif becomes more prevalent in later Class II and III monuments. In general, the Class II single equestrian shows features of degeneration, e.g. the lop ears and awkward proportions of the horse and rider on Meigle 3 and 6 (and Logierait 1). These examples are similar to the horsemen in processions such as St Madoes 1. They share degenerative features in common with Class III horsemen too. The horseman is found more frequently in Class III sculpture. We can assume that the motif became more popular during the later Class II and Class III phases (mid-9th to 10th century) in Pictland. This is true in a wider North British context as well.

In the contemporary cross sculpture of Ireland there is a marked preference for the equestrian procession, lone horsemen occurring rarely (e.g. 'Doorty Cross', Co. Clare). Single horsemen in Irish sculpture are generally part of a larger composition, e.g. a hunt (e.g. Banagher, Bealin).

Meigle 3, 5 and 6 find parallels in the equestrian figures of the 10th century, especially in monuments from Strathclyde (e.g. the equestrian motifs at Govan, Mountblow and Barochan). The Govan sarcophagus and cross slabs bearing horsemen have been dated to the 10th century and they also find parallels in Irish sculpture (Fisher 1994, 51). Examples such as Govan 1(where the horseman is part of a hunt) and 5 have a similar composition to Pictish horsemen — the same 'trotting' gait, awkward leg action and proportions of the horse, with the rider too large for his mount. Govan 1 especially betrays the Pictish influence. The single equestrian motif is rare in N England. Irish examples may provide parallels for a probable 10th century development of the Strathclyde examples (Fisher 1994, 51), the Pictish horsemen likely of an earlier date as suggested by the symbols accompanying Meigle 5 and 6.

The equestrians of the processions are all of the elegant form that appears most frequently in compositions having multiple riders, or are associated with hunt scenes (e.g. Cossans, Aberlemno 2 and 3, Rossie Priory, Hilton of Cadboll, Elgin, St Andrews sarcophagus). Single equestrian figures, often armed, are generally associated with later monuments (e.g. Dupplin Cross, Forteviot 4, Dunkeld 2) or with multiple horsemen showing degenerative features such as St Madoes or Kirriemuir 2.

The single equestrian figure is most reminiscent and suggestive of the imagery of late Roman and Late Antique examples of horsemen — triumphal images of the victorious general or emperor on horseback. If examples at Meigle are close in date to those of Forteviot, Dupplin and Dunkeld, the period of the height of the dynasty of Kenneth Mac Alpin, the symbolism and choice of a single horseman would be a significant image of power and triumph. This is especially indicated by association of the rider with the accoutrements of war — the weapons held by the riders at Meigle or the row of warriors below the horseman on Dupplin. Such a

date is possible if we accept Lang's suggestion that the presence of the hogback at Meigle indicates that sculpture was being produced there well into the 10th century (1974, 214–15).

The image of the single equestrian is one of power and wealth whether understood in a Christian or a secular context. The horsemen at Meigle are generally armed as are most other Pictish horsemen suggesting their role as warriors. In some examples the horseman is associated directly with other indicators of military status such as the Dupplin horseman which is placed above four warriors on foot or the procession of riders preceded by six warriors at Dull. This reinforces the status of the horseman — that of a member of the ruling class, a warrior aristocracy responsible for the protection of the lower ranks of society. The single equestrian can also have a Christian symbolism as discussed above. That the equestrian can have a Christian significance is reinforced by examples where the motif is placed beside the cross of the main face of the monument as at Tarbat 1 and Migvie. Also, where the horseman is associated with the image of David, as on the St Andrews sarcophagus, and at Nigg. David was regarded as an Old Testament ideal for kingship in the Early Medieval period. This suggests that the horseman can be regarded as a symbol of Christian and secular authority and the divine and worldly kingship[10].

As we have seen the equestrian motif at Meigle and elsewhere in Pictish sculpture is the result of a complex network of inter-influences and possible models. The equestrian has a multivalent iconography encompassing both secular and Christian interpretations. The motif is a symbol of socio-political power and status expressing the interests, both secular and Christian of the notables that commissioned the monuments at Meigle.

NOTES

1. In *Image and Icon in Pictish Sculpture* Leslie Alcock calculates that 90% of Pictish horses either 'amble or 'trot' (Alcock 1993, 231).
2. Often in Medieval art horses are portrayed moving with the legs on the same side raised. In actuality the horse would lose balance in such a pose. The Pictish artist has recognised that horses' legs move in pairs of diagonal opposites.
3. For discussion of Pictish symbols and interpretation of their meaning see: C. Thomas 'The interpretation of the Pictish Symbols', *Archaeol J,* 120 (1963), 31–97; I Henderson 'The meaning of the Pictish symbol stones' in Meldrum, E (ed), *The Dark Ages in the Highlands,* 1971, 53–68; A. Jackson, 1984, *The Symbol Stones of Scotland,* Stromness.
4. Descriptions of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (Constantine) also occur in the biographies of two 10th century pontiffs, John XIII (965-72) and John XIV (983-84). The statue may have been known since the 8th century when it prompted Charlemagne to import an equestrian bronze from Ravenna for his palace at Aachen as recorded by the 9th century historian, Agnellus.
5. One may also consider the occurence of the name Constantine in Pictish king lists and Irish annals as a significant choice for a ruler's name or a patron saint as at Govan during the Medieval period. For a discussion see A MacQuarrie 1994 'The Historical Context of the Govan Stones' in A Ritchie (ed) *Govan and its Early Medieval Sculpture,* Stroud, 31–32.
6. For discussions of this topic see: Chadwick, NK 1953 'The Lost Literature of Celtic Scotland', *Scot Gaelic Stud,* 7 (1953), 115–17; Jackson, KH 1958 'The Sources of the Life of St Kentigern' in

Chadwick, NK *et al* (eds), *Studies in the Early British Church*, Cambridge, 273ff; Carney, J 1955 'Suibne Gelt and the Children of Lir', *Studies in Irish Literature and History*, Dublin, 129-31.

7. See *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (Stokes 1901, 50-51) and *Fled Bricrenn* (Henderson 1899, 55-56) for examples of descriptions of horses and trappings.
8. For example, Morid the champion is remembered carrying his weapons astride a dapple-grey steed and Bleiddig son of Eli performed feats at arms mounted on a white horse on the day of combat (Jackson 1969, 147, A.77; 102, B.10).
9. Isabel Henderson has already made this connection between some 9th century Pictish horsemen and the *Book of Kells* horsemen. She discusses the relationship between Pictish art and the *Book of Kells* in depth suggesting a connection between the sculpture at Meigle and the manuscript (1982, 84).
10. Leslie Alcock discusses these ideas in relation to the Dupplin Cross and makes a very interesting observation on the meaning of the horseman and warriors at Dupplin. He suggests that the David scenes which refer to the biblical king imply the divine right of the king or 'potentate' prepresented by the horseman.

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SHORTER NOTES

Notes towards a reading of parts of the Glamis stone

Fordun says that Malcolm II was slain at Glamis by an alliance of the family of Dub mac Máel Choluim and the family of Causantin IV. The foundation of Glamis castle is traditionally placed in the late 10th – early 11th century, and it has long enjoyed the reputation of being the fortress of Máel Coluim. The Glamis stone stands nearby, and the scene in the bottom left hand panel may well depict his murder. Was he killed both by axing, and by drowning? Both are attested Pictish methods of doing away with unwanted people!

The androcephalous horse in the top right hand panel may represent his lineage: The two axes turned in opposite directions might refer to the twin boys born to Eochaid of Leinster and his wife Feidlimid, during their exile in Dal Riata. The root of the name *Eochaid* means 'horse'. They brought up one son themselves, and he was known as Brandub mac Eochaid of Uí Chenselaig in south east Leinster. The other was brought up at the Dalriadan court of their host as the son of his wife, who, not daring to present her husband with the twin girls she had borne at the same time as Feidlimid's twin boys, swapped one of her twins with one of Feidlimid's! He was therefore duly known as Áedán mac Gabráin of Dal Riata, and was the ancestor of Máel Coluim.

The animal in the top left hand panel looks rather tame and friendly to be a lion, or to qualify as the 'fierce beast' of Berchan's prophecy – but it is a pleasantly fanciful thought nonetheless!

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Althea Tyndale.

Pett, pit, pightle – and *'maghras'*

At the Pictish Arts Society 1995 Conference and in *A Pictish Panorama* (pp.11–12), Prof. Nicolaisen mentioned *petia, pett,* as a measure of land in a settlement area. I suppose this must be linguistically related to the East Anglian *pightle.* According to the OED this is Middle English, of unknown origin, and occurs in Anglo-Latin as *pitellum* from the 13th century. It means a small field or enclosure, a close or croft – enough land, generally speaking, for a 'small-holding', or vegetable and fruit garden, to support a good-sized family unit. The word is still in current use in Suffolk and north Essex, at least, even being incorrectly used as a house-name in one place, where the house has been built at the street end of the *pightle*. A *pightle* there normally designates a long, rectangular strip, usually running down to a water-course, and normally part of the total holding, the house and other buildings being at the higher end. However, it can also refer to a strip isolated from the rest of the holding.

Both *pett* and *pightle* appear to be variable in size, though not excessively so. Confirmation of this type of land measurement may be offered from an unexpected quarter. While my uncle, Mr B.B. Tindale, was in Bahrain as a Civil Engineering Surveyor, he was involved in measuring land being purchased from local Arab chieftains by the company for whom he was working. He carefully measured out the plot of land concerned, which the sheikh had told him was

measured in Arabic at so many 'maghras'. When another plot came up for sale my uncle duly measured it, calculated how many 'maghras' that would be, and could therefore work out the price. "No, no!" exclaimed the Arab, "that is very many more 'maghras'!" At first the company supposed this was typical Arab bargaining until my uncle managed to extract the information that a 'maghras' was a variable unit, based on soil fertility, and was equivalent to the amount of ground required to grow one date palm successfully. Of course, this could vary considerably from desert to oasis; but nonetheless it was actually a relatively fixed and therefore calculable amount, generally around 3 to 4 m^2, depending on the type of land.

One wonders whether *pits* and *pightles* were calculated on a similar basis. It should be fairly easy even now to assess this, and see whether the land was best used for pasture or for arable, or both.

It may also be interesting to calculate the area of the landward strips running up from crannogs, mentioned by Sheila McGregor at the Conference. They must correspond to those found along the shores of the Bodensee by the lake-dwellings there – the Höri peninsula at the west end of the lake; and the Pfahlbauten at Unteruhldingen and elsewhere on the north shore, almost opposite Höri. These are early Stone Age, 4000BC (with occupation continued to later dates). This gives a very long period of continuity for this type of settlement with farmed strips of land facing each dwelling. It continues, in fact, into the present century – in many places there are still rows of houses with long garden strips behind them, intended to be sufficient to grow vegetables to feed the family during the year, though not corn, nor is there room for pasture, only for a few hens, caged rabbits, bees, etc.

A comparison of the amount of land involved in *pit*, *pightle*, crannog strip, and present day 'labourer's cottage garden' might be instructive. One might also consult the literary evidence in conjunction with the *pit* settlements, to see how they correspond to known royal sites – were they the farms of 'ordinary' people, or small chieftainships on choice sites? What size family unit could they support? By the tax returns of the Pipe Rolls of the 13th century one may assume that the *pit* settlements held sufficient importance at that date at least, to be regarded as small paying units: in 1272 the 'Petenweme' domain was worth 34 marks of silver. In 1290 Corntun and Petendreich, Stirlingshire 'et per multuram earundem terrarum', was worth £80.16s.8d. Most of the other *Pets* were worth around £3 to £4 per fiscal term (half year).

A more thorough survey of the Exchequer Rolls and other similar documents might reveal some interesting evidence, which could be used to deduce earlier values, in terms of their support of royal and other aristocratic strongholds. This might enable one to define more clearly where early strongholds were sited, and the boundaries of chieftainships and larger clan units.

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NEWS ITEMS

Kirriemuir

Norman Arkinson, Angus District Curator, has informed us of the exciting discovery of a number of new stones at Kirriemuir in March/April 1995.

The story begins with the proposal to widen the entrance to Kirriemuir Parish Churchyard to improve access. Planning permission was given with the proviso that an archaeological excavation took place prior to any developments. The work began on Monday, 20th March when Scotia Archaeology sent a team to Kirrie. Much of the excavated area had already been disturbed by various service trenches but both Historic Scotland and the District Curator considered excavation a worthwhile exercise.

Norman was actually giving a talk on the 'Picts in Angus' in Glen Prosen Hall on the Wednesday night when the Kirrie minister, Rev Malcolm Rooney telephoned his wife to say that a cross slab fragment had been discovered. On the Thursday evening he was examining the new piece on the floor of the Manse lounge! The following day Norman returned to view the excavations and meet Robin Murdoch and his team. By then further fragments had been discovered, and each time Norman visited this continued to be the case.

The excavation originally was only to have been of two weeks' duration, but due to the number of discoveries, this was extended by a further week until 7th April. During this period a total of seventeen stones was discovered, including a complete, though broken, cross slab, and a ringed cross fragment with a portion of an inscription panel. The complete cross slab has a Latin cross with round hollow angles on each side, and on the front all four panels contain rather poor triquetra knots. This is very similar to Kirriemuir 5 presently on view in the Meffan Institute, West High Street, Forfar.

All seventeen stones were discovered in the base of a wall, probably of the pre-1787 churchyard. They had been reused as building material, and with the one exception, it is difficult to resist the temptation to conclude that they have all been deliberately broken.

These discoveries have more than vindicated the original condition on the development to conduct an archaeological excavation. More importantly however, they indicate that Kirriemuir must have been the site of a very important Pictish ecclesiastical centre, perhaps of similar status to Meigle, with its own distinctive style of stone-carving.

A detailed post-excavation report, including descriptions in full of the new stones, is being prepared. Following this, Norman has indicated that he will write a piece for the *Journal* which will also include the five 'old' Kirriemuir stones.

We are most grateful to Norman Atkinson for providing the information for this brief note and look forward to his fuller article.

Collessie Man

The Celtic feast day of Lammas, or *Lughnasa*, incorporates the age old custom of harvest. This year a stone has been harvested in North-east Fife. The Collessie Man, inscribed on a pillar stone known as the Newton of Collessie Stone, was unceremoniously laid to rest during the Autumn of '94 ploughing of a field ion the lands of Melville near the tiny village of Collessie. Ten months later, as the winter barley crop was finally harvested from round the very crevices of the stone, the wisdom of the ancients has prevailed, and the stone has been allowed to stand once again as it has done for thousands of years.

The decision to re-erect the megalith, a standing stone with early Pictish carving of a striding figure in profile, was made by the architects and conservation bodies of Historic Scotland, as current policy prefers keeping stones *in situ* wherever possible. The faint carving of the warrior, together with his twin symbols of an arch and a 'beastie' to the left side around the pillar, only clearly visible in oblique sunlight, were not deemed 'at risk' staying outside, perhaps because

the stone is located deep within several field systems and is not threatened by car pollution from nearby roads. The original location, which I understand was confirmed by a recent excavation by SUAT from Perth where 'undisturbed puddle clay' was found in the socket, is on the rise of a slope at the western edge of the field a few yards from an old wood. If the area was originally forested, the stone may well have stood in a clearing above a mire, or boggy ground below. This also accounts for the severe erosion around the stone, which wasn't helped by close and continual ploughing over many generations of farmers.

When the 10 ft (3.64 m) stone fell, only a mere 12 to 15 inches was seen to have been below ground, the stone balancing virtually on its own weight. Due to the main body of the weight being in the girth of the stone, typical of an elderly citizen, the stone toppled over on its back with the warrior figure on its south side left gazing upwards. The stone, which is defined as being composed of cresta red stone, a pink igneous rock, weighs in at 2.75 tons. However, it should have weighed at least 4.7 tons for its size according to the HS works foreman. It has lost significant weight (i.e. 'sap') over the years, and has presumably dried out to a certain degree.

The date of re-erection of the stone was set at 5th August 1995, starting at 8.30am on a bright Saturday morning. Historic Scotland works men from St Andrews and Stirling were present, as well as a representative from Scottish Power who was on hand to protect the nearby power lines. A concrete 'doughnut' had been made for the stone to stand in, a new method of protection designed by HS architect Dr Bruce Walker. It allows the stone a natural setting yet with a stronger outer protection against the tractor or other farm machinery. The concrete square was craned into place in the socket, which had been dug several feet further around the original spot. The stone was carefully hoisted with the help of only one cleverly strapped belt around the centre point and pivoted into place in the middle of the new concrete socket, all under the professional guidance of Peterhead Company crane operator Eddie Walker from Inverkeithing. As the stone was lowered into the ground a plumb line was used to set it straight and the figure set at the prescribed orientation of SSE toward the fence and the corner of the wood.

The space between stone and its doughnut was then filled with rubble field stones, packed with a mallet, and more stones added until it was packed solid, after which a dozen or so bags of fine sand and Balmullo red chips were poured on, together with gallons of water to set the stones. No concrete was used, for the stone, whose tip was wrapped in plastic as a damp course, rested on natural ground with a purely natural setting. The entire operation took about 3 hours.

The following Monday another crew from St Andrews Historic Scotland returned to clean the stone and tidy up the site. Nylon brushes, both soft and stiff, were used with many gallons of pure water to clean some of the lichen off, which revealed a truly pink stone and a much clearer image beneath. The top of the stone was found to have suffered a small hole, caused by weathering, which needed plugging, so a pointing with lime mortar was used to seal it up. Further bags of sand and pink chips were added, and the stone left in peace.

A fence is to be erected in a 3m area around the stone once it has been decided who pays — either HS or Fife Region. The access route is not decided, and the farmer, Andrew Barr of Halhill Farm, Collessie has already started with his next crop and ploughed again. But this time the stone stood firm. Hopefully it will last another few thousand years in the test of time.

A study of the iconography of the stone will follow in a future article.

Marianna Lines.

BOOK REVIEWS

Animals in Early Medieval Art by Carola Hicks. (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1993). HB; 309PP. £39.50. ISBN 0-7486-0428-6.

Carola Hicks has produced a major study of depictions of animals in the British Isles from the sixth to eleventh centuries AD. Readers of *Pictish Arts Soc J* will find the sections on Scotland (pp.41–55; 97–105; 139–59; 217–26) of particular interest but the other chapters are also important as Pictish sculpture did not exist in a vacuum. In general this is an excellent and authoritative work, well illustrated with both photographs and drawings, though only 15 of the 87 illustrations are in the sections on Scotland.

My main quibbles are organisational. The work is divided into chapters based on date (6th century; 7th century; 8th and early 9th centuries; later 9th and 10th centuries; 11th century) but many of the pieces discussed, particularly the Pictish sculpture, cannot be decisively dated to a particular century. Chapters are subdivided by modern land divisions (England; Ireland; Scotland; Isle of Man) when in fact some pieces are not located in the area they are discussed under. On a personal level I particularly object to having Jedburgh (pp.120–21) placed in England — ethnic titles such as Anglo-Saxon and Pictish might have been preferable. Animals of course do not exist in isolation but in conjunction with other types of art. This causes some problems because the book cannot tidily discuss animals without addressing a number of other topics not directly related to animals but crucial to understanding them.

The book's Index is unreliable. For example, the Ardross wolf (p.92) is not listed under wolf, and the Burghead bulls are not listed under bulls in one instance (p.92) or under Burghead in another (p.94). The Conclusion is rather disappointing, mainly because I was hoping for overall summaries of the main species of animal depicted artistically. This, combined with the incomplete index, makes the book difficult to dip into for specific information.

Other quibbles are minor: there are not nine Pictish bulls (p.45) — examples from sites other than Burghead are oxen or steers; is Eggerness really in Dalriadan territory (p.51), and given that five Class I animals are only known from a single example, can we be sure that animals which only occur on Class II stones were not originally part of the Class I repertoire (p.100)?

Apart from organisational problems, which are largely unavoidable given the vagaries of the material, and some minor points, this book can be warmly recommended.

Craig Cessford

Ardross wolfstone (© JRF Burt)

Iona: a guide to the monuments by John G Dunbar and Ian Fisher. Revised by Ian Fisher. (RCAHMS, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1995). PB; 32PP. £3.50. ISBN 0-11-495269-8.

Iona is so historically and culturally important and venerated as a place of pilgrimage, that it attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year. It is said to be one of the best known but least understood historic sites in Scotland.

Iona: a guide to the monuments is a lavishly illustrated guide which outlines the island's history from St Columba's day to present times. It explains the development of the sacred sites and historic buildings through the tangible remains as they are seen by visitors today.

The Introduction covers the historical background: the founding of the first monastery by Colum Cille or Columba, the foundation of the Benedictine abbey at the turn of the 12th/13th centuries, the erstwhile support of the Lords of the Isles, the 1560 Reformation, the establishment of the Abbey Church as the cathedral of the Isles in the 1630s, the church's collapse and its subsequent fall into ruins, its repair and its resurrection, firstly in the 19th century, and then with the foundation of the Iona Community in 1938.

The bulk of this booklet takes the form of an 'island tour'. One is gently guided from the landing jetty up to the Abbey, stopping *en route* at the Nunnery, St Ronan's Church, MacLean's Cross, the Parish Church and Manse, St Oran's Chapel and Reilig Odhráin, Tòrr an Aba and the High Crosses. Each site visited is described and interpreted, filling in the details and giving the historical background to remains which are, at times, scanty. St John's Cross, which ended up in 50 bits after its 1927 reassembled form was blown down and injured by gales in 1951 and 1957, was returned to Iona in 1990 after extensive repairs in Edinburgh – a concrete replica had been fitted into the original cross-base in 1970. The repaired original is now splendidly displayed in the Abbey Museum, safe from the gale-force winds that can sweep the island. This was clearly the best action to take at the time to preserve this important cross – a replica in the original location and the real thing placed in a *lapidarium* less than 100 metres away – some of our endangered Pictish stones might benefit from a similar approach if the experts deem it the best currently available way to preserve them. The 'National Committee on Carved Stones in Scotland' will hopefully be able to guide us on this delicate problem in future.

Few day visitors probably go past the Abbey, but should they do, the sites of Cladh an Dìsirt, Lochan Mór, Iomaire Tochair, Cobhan Cùilteach, Dùn Cùl Bhuirg, the marble quarry and St Columba's Bay are all described.

This current guide is, in fact, a revised edition of the earlier popular guide *Iona* (HMSO 1983) to take account of recent discoveries and changes. These include not only the return of St John's Cross (see above) but also the excavations of St Ronan's church in 1992 which showed that it was built on the site of a very small earlier Early Christian chapel whose clay-mortared S and E walls were incorporated into the foundations of the medieval building. This Early Christian chapel had in turn been built over earlier graves.

Generally, the revised edition is much improved, particularly in its illustrations. One minor niggle is that the maps are not so well displayed. Although the one of the whole island is now a rather good satellite photograph placed inside the front cover, for the detailed map of the village/Abbey area one now has to look inside the back cover (without being directed there) and this map has been much reduced in size, and it is no longer on a fold-out flap — a particularly useful bookmark as one strode round the sites.

This guide-book really is excellent for the interested day visitor to Iona — indeed essential as one would miss so much without it. For more detailed information the reader is, in any case, directed to *Argyll 4*, the RCAHMS inventory of the island (HMSO, 1982). Given the intended readership it may have been helpful to include a *glossary* of terms. Most readers may know about 'string-courses' and 'dog-teeth', but 'cusped ogival arches' (p.11) or even the mere term 'clearstorey' (*sic*) may not be in the general vocabulary of all tourists!

This book is good value and thoroughly recommended to anyone visiting Iona.

J.R.F. Burt

The ancient monuments of the Western Isles: A Visitors' Guide to the Principal Historic Sites and Monuments by Noel Fojut, Denys Pringle and Bruce Walker. Edited by Denys Pringle. (Historic Scotland, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1994). PB; 72PP. £3.95. ISBN 0-11-495201-9.

A companion volume to the guide to *The ancient monuments of Shetland*, reviewed in *Pictish Arts Soc J*, 4 (Autumn 1993), 51–52, this book should help to fill a gap in the market for a popular guide to the historic sites of the Outer Hebrides. These are certainly less well known than those in other parts of the country, and *The Western Isles* provides a short but comprehensive overview of the stages of the area's development, with a selection of the most interesting monuments to visit described in detail.

There are sections on all periods from the Mesolithic to the early 20th century, but the distribution of monuments through time is distinctly unbalanced, reflecting the to very different rates of survival from different eras (and perhaps the specialist interests of the authors). Thus only three monuments of the Neolithic and Bronze Age are described, but six Norse/Medieval churches or complexes are covered in considerable detail, and vernacular architecture is introduced in a comparatively lengthy essay.

The surviving built heritage is rather singular on the islands between North Rona and Barra. In general buildings are more modest in scale even than in culturally closely related Argyll, and all periods are considerably less well studied archaeologically than they are elsewhere – notably in Orkney and Shetland.

There are however a number of monuments of national importance, above all the standing stones of Callanish and its group of associated sites on Lewis – shown on a map but not described individually – which the reader is reminded is 'the most varied collection of standing stones in Britain' (p.11).

Outstanding in the context of the Iron Age is Dun Carloway on the same island, one of the best preserved of all brochs, and the only site to visit from the period described. Although there was a great efflorescence of fortified sites of various kinds in the Iron Age, many, such as island duns, are difficult to reach. In fact 'Iron Age' is a term that can be legitimately applied to the material culture of the Western Isles almost up to this century, as is pointed out (p.19).

Early Medieval historical sources barely mention the Outer Isles, and though Early Christian carved stones are fairly numerous, they tend to be less elaborate than in Argyll. The Pictish cross-marked symbol stone on Pabbay is mentioned (one wonders to what extent the Western Isles were part of the Pictish kingdom), but the Early Christian 'site to visit' is, somewhat optimistically, St Ronan's Chapel on North Rona. Although this is one of the few Scottish sites comparable to the best Irish Early Christian remains, it has of course been preserved chiefly by its extreme remoteness. The plans and photographs of the building accompanying the description should be useful for the vast majority of interested parties who will most definitely never visit it.

The chapters on the Norse Settlement and the Middle Ages and thereafter have useful historical summaries – not easy to find elsewhere in compact form, perhaps. The chief surviving Medieval monuments are, as elsewhere, castles and churches. The former are both less common and less impressive than in Argyll except for Kisimul Castle, Barra. Some indeed are almost absurdly small. The photograph of Dun Mhic Leoid, Barra (p.34) makes it look like a child's toy against the surrounding landscape. The Medieval churches are also generally modest in scale, except for St Clement's Church at Rodel on Harris. Some are of unusual plan, and the grouping of several churches and chapels at some sites, for example, at Howmore, South Uist, is noteworthy.

The final chapters cover traditional buildings after the '45 and the development of Stornoway – the only historic burgh in the Western Isles. What might broadly be termed industrial buildings are represented by a 'Norse' mill at Shawbost, Lewis, a whaling station at Bunavoneadar, Harris, and Butt of Lewis Lighthouse.

A useful book for the history-minded visitor to the islands of the west then, well illustrated and reasonably priced, if inevitably a little unbalanced in its scope.

Niall M. Robertson

Prehistoric Orkney by Anna Ritchie. (B.T. Batsford, London/Historic Scotland, Edinburgh, 1995). PB; 128PP. £14.99. ISBN 0-7134-7593-5.

It would be hard to think of a more appropriate person than Dr Anna Ritchie to write a book about the monuments of Prehistoric Orkney since her, and husband Graham's, many excavations in the islands have done so much to increase our knowledge of the past there.

It hardly needs to be said that the Orkney Islands are an 'archaeologist's paradise' with a multitude of famous sites. There can be few other areas in Scotland where the author of a popular guide could be selective in covering even the monuments in State care, and certainly no other area where so much has been discovered about the Prehistoric past, no matter how much may remain to be learned.

Well illustrated by photographs and reconstruction drawings on almost every page, and written in the author's usual lively and informative style, *Prehistoric Orkney* should appeal to anyone interested in the past of these beautiful islands. Concentrating on individual monuments and what they have to tell us about daily life, ritual, art and so on, the interested visitor could find it helpful as a guidebook on site.

After an Introduction which emphasises the long history of antiquarian research in the islands, and a first chapter detailing the natural resources of land and sea (and the still unproven, but likely, Mesolithic occupation), the book advances chronologically from the Neolithic period to the dawn of Orkney's recorded history as part of the Pictish kingdom. Four chapters concentrate on the Neolithic, covering settlement sites, chambered cairns, art and ritual sites. The inferences that can be made or suggested about ancient life from the surviving remains are fully covered. There is a (comparatively) large amount of evidence, though interpretations of it may differ.

One thing I would like to question myself, if I may be allowed a rather long digression, is the evidence on the supposed short lifespans of Neolithic people, touched on in the chapter on chambered cairns ('Ancestral celebrations'). On the evidence of the skeletons from Quanterness, it is stated:

> The average life expectancy at 8 months was 20–25 years, and adults could expect to develop osteoarthritis, particularly of the spine ... Very few people, on 11 out of the 85 adults, lived beyond their twenties, and the eldest was about 50 years. The older people in such a predominantly young population would have been vitally important in handing on knowledge and experience (p.61).

Indeed they must have been! I'll put my cards on the table at once and state that I find most of this very difficult to believe. This is not to criticise the author, who has naturally relied on the published works of others for the data in the quoted passage. Much the same thoughts occured to me a few years back when I read John Hedges' *The Tomb of the Eagles* (John Murray, London, 1984), in which comparable statistics are quoted for Isbister chambered cairn, South Ronaldsay. Again, this is not to criticise the author of that interesting book, it is dating methods that are the problem. I merely take this opportunity to air my scepticism about them! May I suggest that such a society **cannot** have existed, and that either:

(a) dating methods for Prehistoric skeletons (children apart) must be radically wrong, or (less probably),

(b) people in the group associated with Quanterness chambered cairn (and other cairns too where skeletons have survived to be examined, of course) who **did** survive to a reasonable age must have been buried somewhere else.

A society in which practically no-one lived past 30, and no-one at all lived to 'three score years and ten' (itself a phrase which, significantly, dates from ancient times), is unheard of now and in the recorded past even in cultures at a Neolithic state of development, e.g. in North and South America, Polynesia, New Guinea, etc., and I think it is only fair to ask for an explanation as to why so many should have died. The reference to osteoarthritis in the quote above might suggest people were simply worn out by back-breaking toil, yet can their lives have been so very much harder than those of their Orcadian descendants up to – say – the beginning of this century, despite the technical innovations the latter enjoyed, and if so how much harder? Twice as hard? Five times as hard?

Furthermore, common-sense suggests that Orkney 4000 to 5000 years ago must have been less unhealthy in environmental terms than many modern societies as it was: (a) temperate in climate, (b) relatively isolated, and (c) existing in a world with a vastly smaller human

population (hence fewer diseases around to catch). Compare this situation to that of a 20th century Indian or African peasant without access to modern medicine. Grandmothers and grandfathers are common even in the poorest families. Digression over.

The chapter on the role of art in life and death in the Neolithic is a particularly original and interesting one. Orkney has 'the most important example of prehistoric art in Scotland' (p.66) in the Pierowall stone, and quite a large corpus of lesser scratched or pecked art from tombs, houses and artefacts is brought together for the first time. Certain carved stone 'ritual' objects are covered too. It seems a shame that the 'T-shaped object from Skara Brae' (p.71) is not shown in a photo, but I note that it does appear in one of Alan Braby's reconstruction drawings, of the interior of a Skara Brae house (p.32). Braby's line reconstructions people the monuments in a way which is a real aid to the imagination. His ancient folk are shown wearing clothes which are – unprovably but surely correctly – carefully cut and decorated. A great improvement on these older books which showed Neolithic and even Bronze Age people dressed in what looked like Fred Flintstone's cast offs.

The chapters on the Neolithic take up more than half of the book – quite justifiably, of course. About the Bronze Age, covered in a single chapter called 'A prehistoric recession?', there is much less to write, the main surviving monuments being comparatively unimpressive barrows and burnt mounds. The gold discs from the Knowes of Trotty and the unique re-usable cist at Sand Fiold are covered in some detail, and a touch of drama is added by an apparent climatic disaster in 1159 BC caused by a volcanic eruption in Iceland – could it happen again?

The seventh chapter on 'Patrons and warlords' brings the reader back into a realm of spectacular monuments with Iron Age round-houses, brochs and earth houses. The short final chapter touches on the folklore that has been attached over the centuries to various sites. There is also a list of monuments and museums to visit, and a short further reading list.

Niall M Robertson

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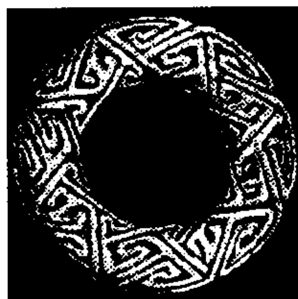

A Pictish Panorama

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