

HISTORIC  SCOTLAND

PICTS, GAELS
AND SCOTS

Sally M Foster

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Early Historic Scotland

SALLY M FOSTER



B T BATSFORD / HISTORIC SCOTLAND

*For Rod and my parents,
Jonquil Alpe and John Foster*

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Acknowledgments

Writing a new edition of *Picts, Gaels and Scots* only eight years after the production of the first has proved a bigger challenge than anticipated due to the sheer volume of new research and ideas, predominantly in non-archaeological disciplines. I am only too conscious that attempts to write a general history such as this – and from so many sources – run the inevitable risk of turning cautious agreement between disciplines into incautious fact through the inevitable inability of any one person to master the ins and outs of all specialisms (see Clancy 2001a). I am grateful to the publishers for allowing this edition to make more use of bibliographic references, better enabling readers to review the detailed evidence for themselves. However, I do not pretend that this is a fully referenced publication.

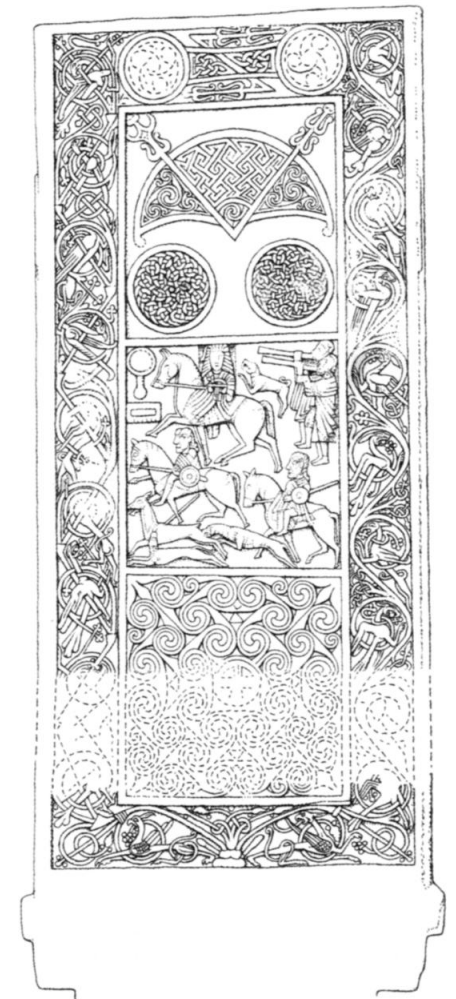
Behind the scenes, many patient and generous scholars have given an enormous amount of information and advice, sometimes in advance of their own publications, and I owe them all many thanks (with apologies where I have fallen into the trap described above by Clancy): Patrick Ashmore, Geoff Bailey, Julie Bond, David Breeze, Dauvit Broun, Ewan Campbell, Thomas Clancy, Barbara Crawford, Neil Curtis, Stephen Driscoll, Nicholas J Evans, Katherine Forsyth, Sarah Govan, Mark Hall, Isabel Henderson, Fraser Hunter, Anna Ritchie, Simon Taylor and Peter Yeoman. Special mention should be made of James Fraser for allowing me to make considerable use of his unpublished PhD thesis, and Alex Woolf who gallantly read a draft of this new edition and suggested many improvements. Repeated thanks are also due to those who contributed so much to the first edition.

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additions; 69 and 73 mainly derive from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) *Argyll* vols 2–5 (Edinburgh, 1975–84) and C Thomas's *The Early Christianity of North Britain* (Glasgow, 1971). As indicated, several maps are based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office; this material is © Crown copyright. Unauthorized reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Historic Scotland Licence No. 100017509 2004.

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The series editor, David Breeze, bravely launched me off on this venture and suggested many ways of improving this text; Tina Persaud and Nicola Birtwistle picked me up at the BT Batsford end. As ever, my most special thanks are reserved for Rod McCullagh.



Introductory note

This book is about the *early* historic period and there is inevitably debate about the exact date of some events; spellings also vary. All dates are AD (Christian era) unless otherwise stated in the text.

Deciding which names to ascribe to people and the places they lived in is fraught with difficulties: even if we know what they called themselves we do not necessarily know what they meant by this name at any particular time, and modern literal translations can have a significantly different sense to past ones. The reasons for choosing the following (after Broun 1994; 1997) are explained in greater detail in chapters 1 and 7:

Date	People	Place
pre-900	<i>Picti</i> /Picts	Pictland
	Dál Riata (<i>Scoti</i> /Gael)	Argyll
10th–13th centuries	'Scots' (Gael)	Alba

Dál Riata is sometimes used to identify people *and* place; here its usage is restricted to Gaelic speakers who lived in that part of western Scotland now known as Argyll (and Bute) and who identified themselves, with their Irish neighbours, as *Goidil*. 'Pictland' is a modern term of convenience (*Pictavia* in medieval Latin sources). The Dál Riata and Picts gradually amalgamated and lived in Alba. It is only from c. 900 that their new identity first begins to have a meaning relating to the ancestry of the modern inhabitants of Scotland, hence the use of 'Scots'; 'Scotland' itself does not exist in this sense until the 13th century.

Many of the places mentioned can be visited, and their location is shown at the back of the book (see illustration 100). All references to illustrations in the book are indicated by **bold** numbers.



Setting the scene

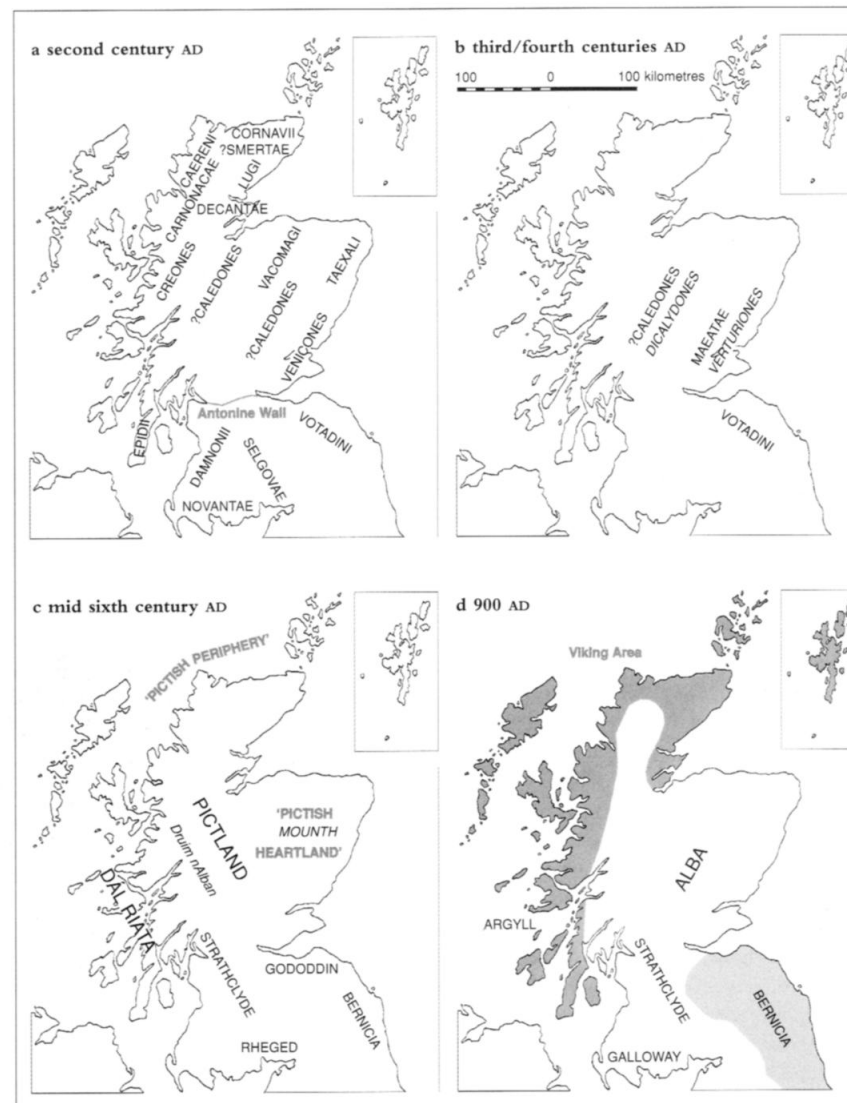
Early historic Scotland, from the 5th to 10th centuries, was home to five different peoples and cultures: the Picts, Dál Riata (Gael), Britons, Angles and latterly the Vikings. By the early 11th century the first four of these groups were unified and Scotland had established a stable and successful monarchy. Geographically it extended south into modern England, while its western and northern fringes, including Caithness, were Norwegian. Since the 10th century, historians have tended to credit one man with laying the foundations of this modern Scottish nation, Cinaed mac Ailpín (Kenneth son of Alpin), a Gael who in 842/3 rose to prominence as ruler of the Picts. Today historians have a different view of Cinaed's role. On the one hand, the earlier achievements of the Picts in beginning the process of consolidation of the Scottish kingdom is recognized. On the other hand, the events of c. 900 are identified as the more important political landmark than the beginning of Cinaed's reign. At this point the name *Alba*, which had originally been the Gaelic word for Great Britain as a whole, was appropriated for Pictland by a new Scottish nation consciously attempting to break with the past. It did so by defining a new type of kingdom, which could be expressed in terms of a territory as well as a group of people.

The key questions are therefore: when did this process of consolidation take place, and why, how and where? There are no ready answers to any of these questions, but as we review the various strands of evidence for the Picts and Dál Riata a clearer picture will begin to emerge.

Who were the Picts?

Classical and later early-historic sources use a variety of evolving terms to signify the people who inhabited the area of modern Scotland and/or their territorial divisions prior to the late 8th century (1). Of these terms *Picti*, first recorded in 297, has been the most enduring. Possibly a Roman derisory nickname meaning 'the painted ones', we cannot rule out the suggestion that this is a Latinized version of what the Picts called themselves, 'people of the designs' (Jackson 1955). Then, as in later classical sources, the Picts were referred to as assailants of the Roman frontier in Britain. Much ink has been spilt over exactly who the ancient writers meant by Picts, but it seems to be a generic term for peoples living north of the Forth–Clyde isthmus who raided the Roman empire. The Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy, writing c. 140–50, recorded as many as 12 tribes inhabiting the region. His sources included information gathered by Agricola, whose son-in-law Tacitus, the Roman historian, documented how in 83 at the battle of Mons Graupius (precise location unknown) some of these tribes combined against the army of his father-in-law, Agricola. We do not know how individuals

1 The known names of tribes and kingdoms in Scotland between the 1st century and the beginning of the 10th century. Precise locations are often difficult to define and fixed boundaries are unlikely to have existed. Nor can we be certain that the various sources named all the existing peoples or completely understood what they were describing.



identified themselves with such tribes. They may have only been loose confederations of people with limited potential for corporate activity, yet they apparently had meeting places, were able to muster military forces when required, had widespread contacts and were capable of participating in long-distance relationships (see *Celtic Scotland*, this series).

The appearance of the term *Picti* cannot be used to infer that the Picts were a 'nation' or uniform people prior to the end of the 3rd century, nor that the people to whom this term was applied had suddenly changed in any way. On the contrary, the Romans were simply distinguishing the inhabitants of Britain who had changed by becoming Romanized (*Britones*) from those to the north who had not. In the Classical sources at least two main internal divisions among this un-Romanized population are referred to: the Maeatae and Caledones of the late 2nd/early 3rd century, later the Caledonii and other Picts, who had become known as the Verturiones and Dicalydone by the mid-4th century. If we follow James Fraser (2003), the political birth of the Picts as a single people ruled by a single king does not take place until the late 7th century, a result of the conscious and determined extension and consolidation of royal authority (see p. 36). We cannot be sure that these were the sole inhabitants of the country but we can be confident that all these people were simply the descendants of the native Iron Age tribes of Scotland, most of whom were never part of the Roman empire, or were only affected by it for short periods of time. The notion of the Picts having existed in Galloway is now recognized as a myth which arose out of a misunderstanding by medieval writers; this area was occupied by other tribes (see 'Who were their neighbours?', page 11).

Who were the Dál Riata?

The Dál Riata were Gaels who had connections with the Antrim tribe of the Dál Riata in north-east Ireland (3). Obscure origin-legend first documented in the 10th century has it that c. 500 one of their number, Fergus Mór mac Eirc, established a new kingdom in Argyll in response to rival dynastic pressures in Ireland. For many years this 'event' has been used to explain why Argyll became Gaelic speaking. However, as David Dumville (2002) baldly puts it, 'stories of Dalriadic origins cannot be held to be worthy of acceptance as history' and Ewan Campbell (2001) has emphasized that there is no archaeological evidence for any such migration at this time. The distribution of prehistoric artefacts and similarities in certain monument types attest, rather, to a much longer tradition of contact between north-east Ireland and west Scotland, beginning in Neolithic times, and Campbell argues that Gaelic became the main language in Scotland

2 The Collessie Stone, Fife: an early native depiction of a Pict.
© Tom Gray, Tom and Sybil Gray Collection



3 *The Book of Kells*, fol. 124r (probably produced on Iona c. 780–806): the Dál Riata as they depicted themselves? (The Board of Trinity College Dublin).



west of *Druim n'Alban* sometime during the 1st millennium BC, the short sea-crossing of the North Channel linking rather than dividing those who lived on either side. Taking into account the later date of the sources, historians therefore need to seek other explanations for the creation of the Fergus Mór mac Eirc foundation legend. A second and probably older origin legend, reported by Bede in the 8th century, attributes the meaning of Dál Riata (tribe/division of Riata) to a leader, Reuda, who came from Ireland. The evidence for Gaelic speakers in south Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Devon around the mid-1st millennium AD should also be noted.

In most modern literature the Dál Riata are referred to as Scots. This is a direct translation of *Scot(t)i* (perhaps meaning 'pirates'), first used by the Classical sources to distinguish them from *Picti*, both of whom are described as early allies in assaults against the Roman empire in Britain. From the mid-4th century Britain was being 'harassed in a never-ending series of disasters' by the Picts, *Scoti*, Saxons and *Attacotti* (an unidentified belligerent tribe from either Ireland or the Western Isles). This was part of a pan-European phenomenon of attacks against the empire that culminated, in some areas, in new settlements, such as the Anglo-Saxon takeover of southern and eastern Britain.

But, in fact, when Classical authors and later early historic sources used the term *Scoti* it had a completely different meaning to its modern English usage. It was used to mean all Gaelic speakers in Britain and Ireland – people who referred to themselves as *Goidil* (Gael) (we must remember the importance of language at this time in defining identity). Only after political changes c. 900 is it appropriate to begin to use the term 'Scots' in its more modern sense (see chapter 7). The names used in this book are therefore slightly at variance to what most readers may be familiar with but they reflect better the political circumstances.

Who were their neighbours?

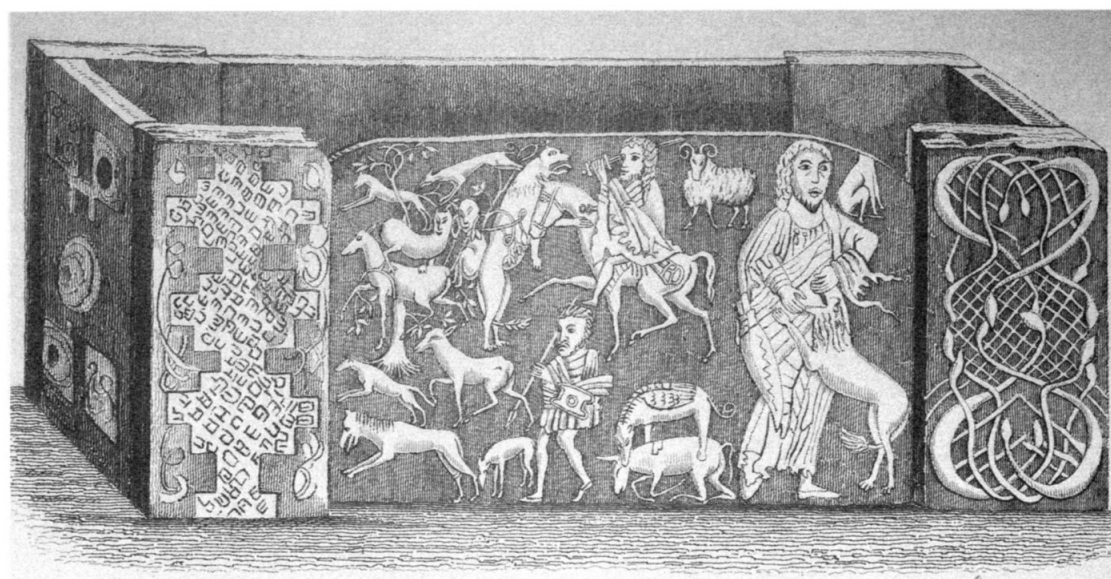
The Picts and Dál Riata had a number of contemporary neighbours whose interrelated history was instrumental to their mutual development and will be discussed where directly relevant. To the south of the Forth–Clyde isthmus the Romans were familiar with a number of native British tribes: the Votadini, Selgovae, Novantae and Damnonii (see 1a). These were the people who by the 6th century had evolved into the British kingdoms of Gododdin in the Lothian area (the name Gododdin comes from the Votadini, whose principal stronghold was *Din Eidyn*, probably Castle Rock, Edinburgh), Strathclyde (based on Dumbarton Rock) and others in south-west Scotland and north-west England (see 1c). But the Angles – Germanic peoples who first invaded England in the early 5th century – were soon to make their presence felt in the north. Around the mid-6th century they had established the kingdom of Bernicia in Northumbria with its stronghold at Bamburgh, and from 638 with the capture of Edinburgh they also gained Lothian (until 973) and, more briefly, territory to the north of the Forth.

Initially hostile to Dál Riata, Picts, Angles and Britons alike were the Vikings, aggressive invaders from Scandinavia (largely Norway, but latterly Denmark) whose first recorded attack on the British Isles took place in 793 on Lindisfarne in Bernicia. From the following year their attacks increased and were reported by contemporary annals as amounting to 'devastation of all the islands of Britain by the gentiles [pagans]'. Shortly afterwards settlers also came. They colonized the northern and western fringes of Scotland, including large parts of both Pictland and Argyll, as well as establishing important bases around the Irish Sea. By the later 9th century Norse settlement was firmly established in the Northern Isles and Caithness (see *Viking Scotland*, this series). Ultimately it was the presence of the Vikings and their continuing expansionist tendencies that were instrumental in the final unification of the Dál Riata and Picts (see 1d).

The history of interest in the Picts and Dál Riata

As first noted by John Toland in 1726, 'they are apt all over Scotland to make everything Pictish, whose origin they do not know' (quoted in Cowan 2000): 'Pictish towers', brochs built by the inhabitants of north and west Scotland from whom the historical Picts were descended, are the classic example. As Cowan has shown, this interest is part of the long, ongoing process of invention of a 'Celtic Scotland' that today we seek to place on a more academically robust, if less romantic, footing. The Picts primarily captured the imagination of early antiquaries and travellers because of their unique symbols and other distinguishing characteristics. This bias in interest continues although it is gradually being redressed.

Antiquarians of the 16th century such as William Camden and Hector Boece were interested in the Picts, though their comments are primarily restricted to observations derived from Classical texts. By the 18th century travellers such as Thomas Pennant and the compilers of *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791–97) were drawing attention to the existence of surviving physical remains, particularly sculpted stones. It was these carvings that received most attention during the 19th century (4) and the first half of the 20th; a concern for their deteriorating condition led to the publication in 1903 of the first, and to date only, cataloguing of the corpus of Scottish sculpture (Allen and Anderson's *Early*



4 Early antiquarian reconstruction of the St Andrews Sarcophagus.

Although there are inaccuracies we get an impression of the composite, box-like form.

Engraving by Joseph Swan from a drawing by James Stewart, 1840.

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Christian Monuments of Scotland). The mid-19th century also witnessed the foundations of serious research into the early historic documentary sources.

But it is only since the 1950s that early historic studies in Scotland fully came into their own, with leaps in our knowledge through excavation, field survey and historical, place-name and art-historical research, enhanced by interpretative analyses of this evidence from a variety of differing perspectives. A major landmark was the Dundee conference in 1952 which resulted in the publication of the first comprehensive survey of Pictish archaeology, *The Problem of the Picts* (Wainright ed. 1955). The memorable title of this book has unfortunately been something of a hindrance to later studies, since it reinforces the 'enigmatic' aspects of the Picts; despite the disclosures of modern research, it is sometimes still difficult to shatter this perception.

But to be fair to its contributors, in 1952 they could not 'point to a single fortress or to a single dwelling or burial and say with certainty that it is Pictish... The problem lies in the recognition or identification of material as Pictish.' This dilemma is perhaps echoed in Isabel Henderson's *The Picts* (1967): 'quite the darkest of the peoples of Dark Age Britain'. This first modern survey was inevitably biased towards historical and art-historical aspects but is reflective of a time when careful scholarship was beginning to dash fantasies about the Picts.

Significant advances in the recognition of archaeological sites as Pictish or early historic can be said to have begun in the 1970s, the result of serendipity in the case of sites being excavated to 'rescue' them from damage, as well as judicious programmes of university-led research. Non-invasive archaeological surveys, particularly aerial photography and field surveys by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical

Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), account for the rapid increase in the number of 'dots on the map' that may potentially belong to this period. At the same time we continue to be able to benefit from advances in archaeological techniques and science, such as new ways of dating material (chapter 2).

Since the 1990s early medieval studies in Scotland can be said to be undergoing something of a renaissance. As Barbara Crawford (1997) puts it, this is a period 'where practitioners from many disciplines collide in the same chronological time-frame'. The published call for inter-disciplinary work dates to 1949, but it is perhaps only now that this is truly beginning to happen. The volume of relevant new literature and the range of disciplines that it emanates from is daunting (see Further Reading for the tip of the iceberg).

But for all this we cannot and must not be complacent, as the review of sources in chapter 2 will show. None of our seams of evidence are even remotely worked out and there are still enormous biases in our approaches to the sources.

How enigmatic are the Picts?

Current learned opinion largely favours Leslie Alcock's 1987 view that the Picts were 'a typical northwest European barbarian society, with wide connections and parallels' and that they were thought of as such by their neighbours. The major archaeological discoveries since the 1950s and the most recent historical syntheses tend to support this notion.

So how then did the idea of the Picts being 'enigmatic' arise? Six key issues can be pinpointed as responsible for the evolution and sustenance of this so-called problem: Pictish symbols; Pictish language; matrilineal succession; the 'Foul Hordes Paradigm' (barbarism); the lack of Pictish documentary sources; and the Picts as a lost people. Most of these issues are dealt with in later chapters. The connecting factor is that they each identified the Picts as being somehow 'different', and cumulatively the impression they built was a strong one.

The Picts would definitely not hold the same place in the hearts of the world if their unique symbols did not exist (5) (see chapter 5). Found in much of Pictland, and almost exclusively there, they comprise a range of diverse motifs that were placed on sculpted stones, cave walls, everyday objects and splendid jewellery. Their precise meaning eludes us although interpretations abound. But their distinct nature should not obscure the fact that they are but part of the Pictish artistic repertoire and that in most other respects the material culture of the Picts was little different from that of their neighbours, with whom they shared much in common. In fact, the study of the ornament used in these symbols can contribute to placing Pictish art and society in a wider, more familiar context. Nonetheless, there remain overall many aspects of their art that make the Picts stand out from their European neighbours.

The notion that some of the Picts, unlike their neighbours, spoke a non-Indo-European language (page 19) is probably ill-founded. Furthermore, arguments for the unusual practice of matrilineal succession are now robustly discredited (page 35).

In what has been referred to as the 'Foul Hordes Paradigm' after a description of the Picts by the 6th-century British writer Gildas, the Picts were often considered to have been more barbaric and backward than their neighbours. Their alleged body tattooing, a practice long neglected by others, was seen to reinforce this (although its practice cannot



5 Pictish symbols incised on a reused prehistoric standing stone at Aberlemno, Angus.

be confirmed and the tradition may simply stem from attempts to exaggerate the 'barbaric' qualities of the Picts). Similarly their reputed use of matrilineal succession was said to hark back to earlier times. The aggression and military prowess of the Picts cannot be doubted (as attested in Classical and early historic sources). However, given the warlike nature of contemporary society, it is questionable whether they were any more martial than their neighbours, who obviously had something to gain in suggesting how barbaric the Picts were, as indeed did the earlier Roman invaders. On the contrary, it can be demonstrated that Pictish society was as complex and sophisticated as that of its neighbours.

Only one Pictish documentary source survives and in comparison to contemporary Ireland, Argyll is also poorly served (page 20). This has led to the Picts and Dál Riata being said by Henderson (1967) to lack what has been referred to as 'personality', unlike the 'special character and charm' of their Irish neighbours. This paucity of native Pictish writing has given freer reign to more fanciful interpretations of their past.

Finally, early observers perceived the Picts as becoming a 'lost people' shortly after the Scottish takeover (chapter 7). While some evidence can be brought forward to support this case, it can also be demonstrated that many aspects of Pictish society did in fact continue. However, the 'lost' label has undoubtedly served to reinforce the Picts' enigmatic qualities.

Traditional interpretations are still prone to emphasize the differences rather than similarities between the Picts and the Dál Riata. There is no suggestion here that the Picts were not distinct, or are unworthy of their modern popularity, but in order to better understand northern British society, it is necessary to look beyond these apparent peculiarities. The discoveries made and research carried out since the 1950s present the opportunity to do so.

Communicating with the past: the sources

A wide range of differing sources exists for the study of the Picts, Gaels and their neighbours. While in practice it would be very unusual to use any of these in isolation, each has peculiar characteristics and limitations that require consideration before any attempt is made to synthesize them into a meaningful whole.

Documentary sources

The Picts and Dál Riata lived during the so-called early historic period, known variously throughout the British Isles as the Dark Ages, early Christian period, early medieval period, or Late Iron Age. The term 'early historic' was first coined to emphasize the availability for the first time of local (in the sense of non-Classical) sources. While the Picts are the worst documented early historic peoples in modern Scotland, the Dál Riata are the best.

Documentary references to the events of the 4th to mid-6th centuries in Scotland are few and Alcock (2003) doubts the possibility of being able to write a reliable history of anywhere in Britain in this period. Such later sources as exist have the potential to provide evidence for a general political background against which the archaeological sources can be reviewed (and vice versa) and also evidence for specific events that are unlikely to be identifiable on archaeological grounds alone. Most sources tend only to refer to major political events and are not directly concerned with ordinary people. Fortunately, the authors sometimes included incidental information about daily life which, although insignificant to them, can be very useful to us. In addition, external sources (particularly those from Ireland and Wales) provide a basis for interesting yet informed speculation about the nature of both Pictish and Dál Riata society.

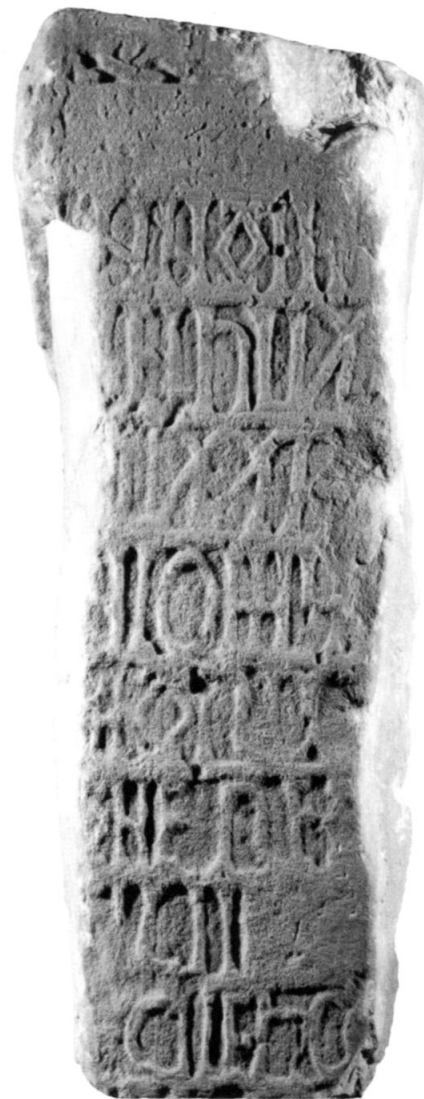
However, the value of documentary sources lies not just in the direct archaeological, linguistic or political implications of their content, but in consideration of the social processes that brought them into being, and of what lay behind their production and preservation. Any document tells us more about the time it was written than the time it purports to describe.

In general terms, a number of factors must be borne in mind when considering how reliable any documentary evidence is. Firstly, who or what were the sources and how reliable can they be expected to be? Did the writer have direct experience of the events being described and how long after the event were they being recorded? Secondly, since no original 5th- or 6th-century manuscripts survive from the British Isles, and most texts are normally copies of copies, what processes have intervened to alter the originals? Scribal error and conscious amendment (perhaps politically motivated) are the obvious problems here. Historians such as Broun and Dumville are actively engaging in 'textual archaeology', unravelling how texts have come to us in the form they have. The results of their new readings

and complex analytical labours make a pretty gloomy assessment of how far we can reliably use such sources to read back to much of the early historic period, although their implications for understanding later politics are very exciting and these historians have not been shy in rewriting their earlier ideas. At the opposite chronological end of the source spectrum are oral and folkloric traditions; use of these requires very special handling indeed.

Only one text of any kind can fairly be claimed as Pictish, the so-called king list, which gives lengths of reigns. Two versions exist, neither of which are in a manuscript older than the 14th century and one of which is heavily Gaelicized. The list contains the names of more than 60 kings of whom about thirty may be regarded as historical, in the sense that they are known to us from other sources. Ongoing research by Nicholas Evans suggests both groups of copies of the king list have a mid-9th century common source, although a version of the king list is likely to have first been written by the 660s.

Scholars debate whether Pictish scriptoria were ever very active so the new archaeological evidence for vellum manufacture at the monastery at Portmahomack, Highland, is a timely reminder of on what partial and scant evidence such assumptions are founded. We hardly need doubt that the church used biblical, liturgical, computistical and exegetical texts and we can see from surviving sculpture that elaborate manuscripts were in circulation and that monks carried books (6; Forsyth 1998), so the only outstanding question is the extent to which these were being produced in Pictland. Evidence occasionally comes to light for what may be unknown Pictish texts embedded in other documents (such as Forsyth 2000). The trend is therefore towards acknowledging greater Pictish use of literacy than has previously been credited, the absence of surviving examples being due to chance and political



6 'In the name of Jesus Christ, the (a?) Cross of Christ in memory of Reof...llius on this day'. The longest comprehensible surviving Latin text, this inscription from Portmahomack demonstrates that the Picts, like their contemporaries, were using *Insular de luxe* script of the period (late-8th/early-9th century).

circumstance (chapter 7). This is not to say that much of Pictish genealogy, history and literature were not retained through oral transmission. Whatever the reason, the scarcity of surviving written sources and the imbalance between those of Dál Riata and Pictish origin is unfortunate since this disparity again leads to a tendency for the Picts and Dál Riata to be treated differently both in comparison to each other and in relation to their neighbours.

No surviving separate list of Dál Riata kings pre-dates the late 11th-century Irish *Duan Albanach* (literally, Scottish Poem), but genealogies are incorporated into the *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* (The Explanation of the Genealogy of the [Gaelic] Men of Britain) which also contains origin-legend, civil survey and military assessment. In its present form this is a 10th-century edition of a mid 7th-century document that may have been drawn together in Ireland. Having re-edited it, Dumville (2002) regards it as a compilation from an original series of overlapping texts, which are both incomplete and of different dates. He argues that the emphasis is genealogical and hence political, although the context in which such a text might have been produced is not yet clear, and casts doubt on how the better-known survey and assessment elements are to be interpreted (chapter 6).

Fortunately, references to the activities of the Pictish and Dál Riata royalty and aristocracy are also found in Irish sources that draw on Dál Riata material (none of which now survives in Scotland); only surviving in later medieval manuscripts, these appear to have been fairly faithfully copied from the originals and therefore provide a good source for events in Argyll and beyond. Detailed contemporary records of outstanding events were probably being compiled at Iona from the 670s until about 741 and these were subsequently incorporated in Irish texts such as the *Annals of Ulster*. As the pre-eminent monastery in Argyll and mother-church of monasteries on both sides of the North Channel, Iona was closely involved with the development of the early church in Ireland. Much material was probably transmitted there, particularly when Ionan monks fled to Ireland at times of political pressure and Viking threats. From about 675 to the 740s there may also have been a monastic source at Applecross (in present-day Highland).

The *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* is preserved in a 14th-century manuscript but may originally have been composed as early as the late 10th century (Dumville 2000). It is likely to have been based on multiple written sources of different dates. Perhaps compiled at the monastery of Brechin (in Angus), it contains annals and a king list for the 150-year period following the accession of Cinaed mac Ailpín in 842/3, detailing the infant kingdom's struggle for survival against the Vikings. Events are only dated by reference to reign, regnal year or events taking place elsewhere, which is problematic. It is particularly important because it belongs to a period when northern English annals cease to be very informative about their Scottish neighbours.

Relevant narrative accounts take the form of contemporary or near-contemporary attempts to describe the history of Britain. They include references to events in Pictland and Argyll, or near-contemporary saints' *Lives*, but only one surviving example was written in Scotland.

Our study would be severely impoverished were it not for the survival of this one source, Adomnán's *Life of Columba*. Columba was the first abbot of the monastery of Iona from after 563 until his death in 597. Adomnán was one of his successors (679–704). In assessing Adomnán's account we have to bear in mind that he may be revealing how things

really were in the 6th century (Columba's time), how he thought they were, how they were in the 7th century (Adomnán's time) or how he *wished* them to be during his lifetime (Márkus 1999). We need also to consider why he wrote it and what audience he had in mind. This vivid source of evidence for people, places, and religious, social and political practice has therefore to be carefully filtered. Additionally, uncritical reliance on this single account undoubtedly skews our perception of this period and the role of Columba in introducing Christianity to Scotland. Other saints are less well known: either their *Lives* do not survive; or they were not involved with such important secular dynasties as Columba; or the monks of Iona set a highly efficient and successful propaganda machine in place. The writings of clerics are unlikely to be devoid of religious or political bias and *Lives* were generally compiled to promote interest in a local saint and his or her relics (for early pilgrims) and to provide evidence for the rights, rents and dues of the churches with which the saint was connected, and the relationships of authority among churches, and between churches and secular authorities. Adomnán's account is no exception (chapter 3).

The most useful narrative is that finished in 731 by the English monk Bede at the Northumbrian monastery of Jarrow, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* or *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede did use sources that we know to be unreliable, notably an account by Gildas, a 6th-century British monk probably writing in south-west England, entitled *De Excidio Britanniae* (*Concerning the Ruin of Britain*). But Bede also relied on witnesses and other 'respected and learned men' who sent him reports and whom he was able to interrogate. One such source was undertaking archival research as far away as Rome. Bede was primarily interested in the English nation, but its history, and particularly that of the Northumbrians, was very much tied in with that of the Dál Riata and Picts. His account therefore contains direct and indirect accounts of events that are fundamental to our understanding of the development of Scotland.

Although charters (records of transfer of property rights) were widely prevalent in Anglo-Saxon England, no early examples survive in Scotland. A 10th-century Gospel book known as the Book of Deer contains Gaelic notes written in the 1130s to 1150s that describe systems of land tenure in Buchan relating back to earlier practice (7; Forsyth ed. forthcoming). This is not to suggest that all 'administrative' transactions of gifts of land and/or privileges were written down at this time (Davies 1998; Forsyth 1998) and in Scotland, as in Ireland, alternative permanent records of this nature might include carved stones (chapter 5). Other sources give us an insight into the types of rights that might exist. For instance, Adomnán's *Life of Columba* suggests that the monks of Iona had rights to a wide range of resources from various places (such as timber for building and ship construction).

Although there is an occasional later reference to the fact that laws were promulgated, Pictland and Argyll, unlike contemporary Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England, are bereft of surviving law tracts such as the Irish *Críth Gablach* (Laws of Status) which deal with the duties and privileges of various grades of society. Elsewhere these contain a vast array of invaluable information about the structure of society and more mundane details of everyday life, from a list of household contents to agricultural practices such as bee-keeping, and the physical appearance of buildings. The only surviving piece of legislation is Adomnán's 7th-century 'Law of the Innocents' for the protection from war of women, children and clerics (Márkus 1997).

A surprisingly large amount of early medieval secular and religious poetry has come down to us, providing a 'window on the thoughts and sensibilities, the imagery and ideals of early medieval Scotland' (Clancy ed. 1998). While nothing survives in Pictish, there are poems written in Gaelic for Pictish kings and north British texts that reveal the close political and cultural links between Britons and Picts. By far the best known northern British poem is *Y Gododdin* (The Gododdin), a series of elegies to heroic warriors killed during the defeat of the Britons and their allies by the Angles at Catraeth (Catterick, Yorkshire). This gives a sense of the warlike and aristocratic society that existed in northern Britain at this time, although it is not a reliable basis on which to construct a historical narrative. Scholars debate when the events it describes took place (perhaps between 540 and 570) and whether it is authentically the work of Aneirin, a famous 6th-century British poet (Dumville 1988).

Language and inscriptions

Bede states that the four nations of Britain – the English, British, Irish [Dál Riata] and Picts – each had their own language, 'united in their study of God's truth by the fifth – Latin'. The Celtic language group (a branch of the Indo-European languages)

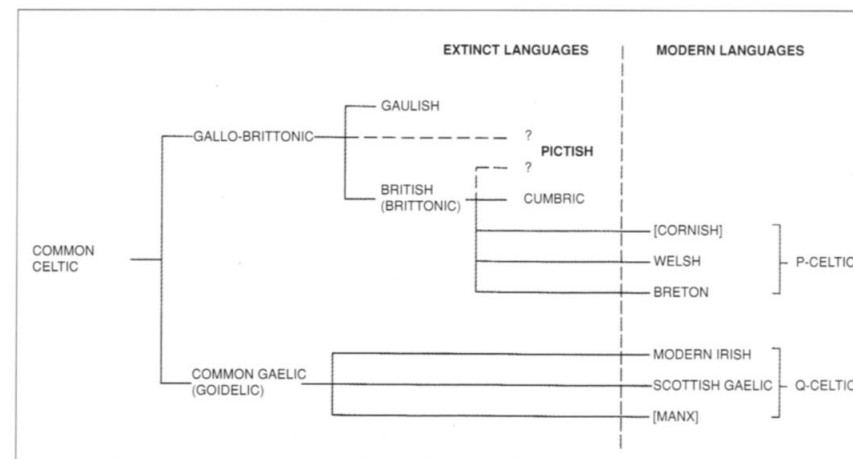
can be divided into several types and sub-groups from which modern Celtic languages evolved (8). Of these, Q-Celtic (Gaelic) was spoken by Gaels in both Argyll and Ireland, but there used to be considerable controversy over which language(s) the Picts spoke.

It was first suggested in the late 19th century that some of the Picts spoke or retained a pre-Celtic, non-Indo-European element in their vocabulary. If true, this would have strongly demarcated the Picts from their neighbours and might imply the continuity in Pictland of other unusual practices. However, more recent research by Katherine Forsyth (1997a) suggests convincingly that the Picts only spoke another type of Celtic language, P-Celtic. This language was different from the Q-Celtic of their Dál Riata neighbours and this explains why St Columba (a Q-Celtic speaker from Ireland) needed an interpreter to speak to Picts on or near Skye.



7 The Book of Deer: this little Gospel book was produced c. 900, perhaps at Deer itself. In the 12th century Gaelic records of land-grants to the monastery were added around the framed portrait (by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).

8 Summary of Celtic languages showing the possible derivation of the Pictish language, which is also likely to have incorporated pre-Celtic elements. Q-Celtic used the qu or k sound, where P-Celtic used the p sound. [] indicates revived language.



The boundary between the P- and Q-speakers shifted with time as Pictland was Gaelicized in the centuries leading up to around 900, but it seems likely from place names preserved in historical sources that Skye, the Western Isles and the north-west mainland were still Brittonic- (P-Celtic) speaking in the 6th and probably 7th centuries, at least.

The number of surviving inscriptions in Scotland is frustratingly few (Forsyth 1998) and by no means a reliable indicator of the extent of literacy (chapter 5). Most surviving early historic inscriptions are in ogham, a form of script that originated in an Irish-language context between the 1st and 5th centuries (9). Predominantly discovered on formal stone monuments, examples of informal ogham-inscriptions on small stone and bone objects are increasingly being discovered from archaeological excavations (10). More than 30 inscriptions have been found in Pictland, fewer than ten in Argyll. These Scottish examples date from the 6th to 10th centuries, the majority to the 7th to 9th centuries. Forsyth (1995) has now shown that more texts are comprehensible than previously thought. Many are weathered or fragmentary, but most of those that are still legible record recognizably Celtic personal names. Some are in P- and some in Q-Celtic, reflecting the increasing Gaelicization of Scotland. This is important because the decline of the Pictish language is traditionally attributed to the political events of the 9th century (chapter 7) but this process may have begun far earlier. A suggestion that Scottish oghams are written in Norse has been sharply rebutted (Barnes 1999).

Ten or so inscriptions survive in Pictland that use Roman letters, of which at least seven are in Latin. These are found in Christian contexts where formal public display was also important and Latin could be understood by at least some of the intended audience. There are slightly more examples from Argyll, the majority of which are in Irish. A symbol-incised stone pillar from Newton, Aberdeenshire, has an ogham inscription down one side, but there are also six lines of an unknown (debased Roman?) script that are indecipherable.

Despite their infrequency, the importance of these inscriptions should not be underestimated since they are the only contemporary written native 'records'. Their significance therefore extends beyond what they actually say and the style of the script, to

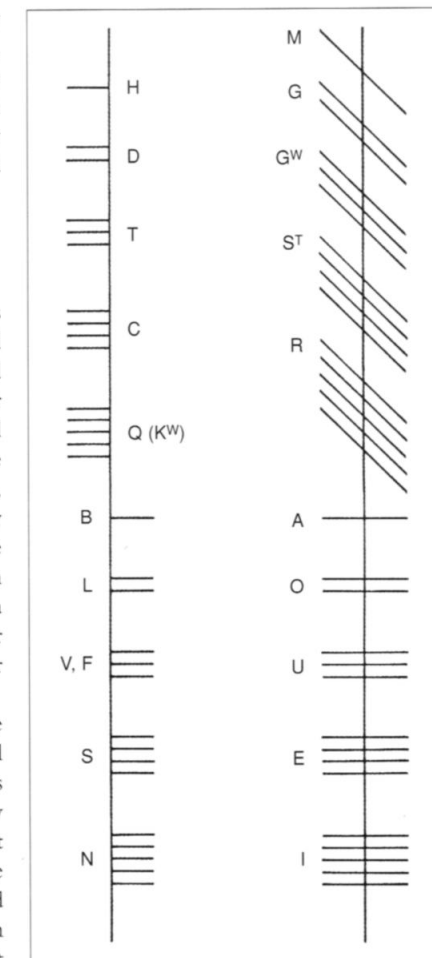
where and on what they are written, by whom and for whom they were created, and how they were actually used. While inscriptions may do little to augment the historical framework, they do, very importantly, indicate the presence and extent of literacy (chapter 5).

Archaeological sources

The archaeological evidence for the Picts and Dál Riata consists of surviving physical remains: upstanding field monuments, soil or crop-mark sites, sculpted stones, other artefacts and ecofacts (environmental evidence). This is the source that has the greatest potential to provide new data, through the process of excavation. Like any data source it is prone to multiple interpretations. Regardless of the approach taken to understanding the evidence, a common problem is identifying whether the material relates to either the Picts or Dál Riata in the first place.

Over 230,000 sites of all periods are already recorded in the National Monuments Record of Scotland and this number rises all the time as new archaeological sites are discovered. Yet only a very small proportion of these have been, or ever will be, excavated and dated (11). On the principle of working from the known to the unknown, most monuments therefore need to be interpreted according to the similarity of their physical characteristics (morphology) to those of known sites that are considered distinctive enough to be grouped together for purposes of analysis and are also, hopefully, broadly contemporary with each other.

This method is obviously prone to errors, however, since superficially similar features may not only have different functions but totally different dates; excavation is the only way to tell. For example, while some rectangular timber halls (recognized only from crop marks; see 43) are known to be early historic in date, one of the few to be excavated (at Balbridie, Aberdeenshire) has been demonstrated to be Neolithic, over 3,000 years older than the Picts. This caution has to be coupled with awareness of the enormous regional diversity of the record and the small-scale and geographically biased nature of previous excavations. These



9 Summary of the ogham alphabet as used in Scotland. Letters are distinguished by strokes on either side of a line and are arranged in consonant and vowel clusters, bearing a resemblance to phonetic principles established by late Roman grammarians.



10 Ogham-inscribed stone spindle-whorl from Buckquoy in Orkney, reading (in Old Irish) 'a blessing on the soul of L'. Spinning is traditionally a female pursuit so there are implications for the literacy of women (Forsyth 1995a).

of reasons, not least subsequent land use and landscape development, and our capacity to detect and recognize what now survives.

Although confined to high-status sites, documentary sources can be used to identify monuments that are contenders for early historic date. Fortunately a characteristic feature of the annals is the frequency with which sites in Scotland, largely hilltop fortifications, are mentioned. A successful campaign of trial trenching by Leslie and Elizabeth Alcock from 1974–84 has confirmed the identity of some of those sites whose dates and location could be inferred from the sources.

To date, little large-scale excavation has been undertaken as part of a research programme targeted at understanding known early historic sites. Excavations at the Pictish monastery of Portmahomack are the notable exception, not least for being exploration of a church as opposed to a settlement site; its systematic analysis can be contrasted with the piecemeal manner in which Iona has been explored over the last 130 years (O'Sullivan 1999). This reflects the fact that properly executed archaeology is an expensive process that cannot be rushed, and that funds for research-driven excavations are limited. Elsewhere sites with a significant early historic component have been discovered by chance in the course of university-led research excavations at sites such as Bornais (Western Isles), Old Scatness (Shetland), or in Angus and Perthshire on projects seeking to better understand crop-mark archaeology.

By far the majority of newly discovered and excavated sites are the outcome of state- and developer-funded rescue excavation in advance of coastal erosion, dessication of waterlogged deposits, housing developments and new roads – threats that introduce a further bias into the data. For instance, every effort is made to avoid unnecessary disturbance of known church sites and the likelihood of discovering an abandoned and unknown early church site is low. The fortunate discovery of early historic remains in these contexts is usually serendipitous and can yield surprising results, not least from large

factors further limit our capacity to understand sites on the basis of their apparent form alone, whether ploughed-out sites or upstanding monuments. Interpretation of crop marks is often complicated by the fact that they may represent a range of sites whose upstanding equivalents no longer survive (since they were made of timber) or have not yet been noted. Furthermore, since crop marks can only be recognized under favourable climatic conditions and in certain types of soil (generally cultivated land, hence usually the better soils of the lowlands) their potential as a means for locating archaeological sites is geographically predetermined. Distribution maps of any kind of archaeological site will therefore be biased for a wide range



11 Newton, Islay: a combination of limited excavation and analogy would suggest that these crop marks include a cemetery of approximately the 4th–8th centuries. The ditches around ploughed-out barrows (earthen mounds) can be seen in the aerial photographs as dark rings, since deeper soil retains the moisture longer than the surrounding areas (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

open-area excavations. However, there is currently no large-scale landscape-orientated research focusing on the early historic period that can be said to be inter-disciplinary in nature (and appropriately resourced). This is a significant omission since archaeologists need to test and develop the big ideas that are being produced by historians and place-name specialists (as well as their own ideas). With the welcome increase in on- and off-site environmental analyses we are better equipped to describe the vegetation in the landscape but not its organization and use. Archaeologists hope for datable material from contexts that can be securely related to identifiable phases in a site's development. Many significant sites and artefact collections are the result of poor, earlier excavations (notably those excavations taking place in the 19th and early 20th century), in which the sequence of events is little understood. Fortunately the tide is turning with the long-heralded publication of important later 20th-century excavations as well as exploration of sites with deep, complex and dated stratigraphies, particularly in the Western and Northern Isles (12).

Absolute dating techniques are commonly used, principally radiocarbon (C-14), thermoluminescence (TL) and dendrochronology (tree-ring dating). Optically stimulated luminescence (OSL: the dating of the last exposure to light of quartz grains) is also beginning to make its mark. For the early historic period C-14 and TL, often with dating brackets of up to several hundred years, do not tend to



12 An aerial view of Old Scatness (Shetland) where major excavations are revealing the detailed architectural and social complexities of a settlement spanning more than a millennia. With its tightly dated building sequences and wide, rich range of associated artefacts, this one excavation is producing results that challenge long-held views on many aspects of the Iron Age and early historic period in northern Scotland (Stephen Dockrill).

provide the tightly defined dates that are required to synchronize the archaeological evidence with the emergent political scene or presumed natural disasters (see below). The dating brackets they provide are often also so wide that it is impossible to correlate observations reliably across time and space. Hence short-lived, widespread but specific phenomena, which may be of long-lasting significance, can pass unnoticed. However, C-14 dating is now standard practice and its application to both new and old material is casting new light on a range of human practices, notably trends in burial. Dendrochronology, on the other hand, has the potential for accuracy to a specific calendrical year but it relies on the survival of assemblages of sufficiently large oak timbers to provide a distinctive sequence of tree-ring widths that can be measured and matched against a dated master chronology. If all the sapwood survives, the exact year in which the tree was felled and, by implication, of the related building activity, can be calculated. A calendrically dated chronology covering 7,000 years has been constructed using Irish oak, and this has been used to date two early historic chronologies from Buiston in North Ayrshire and Whithorn in Dumfries and Galloway, giving us a Scottish oak chronology for the period 250–752 (such chronologies are not yet feasible for other Scottish wood types). The increasing number of dates from across Scotland point to broader 'event horizons' related to the history of the exploitation and husbandry of timber that require social and/or political explanation. More timbers are needed from structures of all dates and from all over Scotland to fill the gaps and resolve such questions (Crone and Mills 2002). Comparison of dendrochronological with C-14 dates from Buiston crannog is highly telling of the limitations of the latter and a cautionary tale for all to note.

Certain years stand out in the tree-ring record as marking periods of extreme environmental hardship (so-called 'marker dates') when trees put on very limited growth, resulting in narrow tree rings. These usually correspond to major acidity layers and/or variations in precipitation in the appropriate layers of ice-cores drilled in Greenland. The suggestion was put forward that these events could be correlated with major volcanic eruptions whose widespread dust veils led to declining agricultural yields, disease, and hence social change. Such layers of tephra (volcanic ash) are certainly recognized in some archaeological contexts and help with dating when they can be related to known and dated volcanic eruptions. Baillie (1999) has suggested that the impact of cometary fragments or dust-streams may also be a factor in explaining these catastrophic events.

One of these marker dates covers the period 536–45, corresponding with a time when plague, bad weather and famine are recorded across Europe, including Ireland. Sudden changes in the archaeological record at this time have been noted in Ireland and Germany and we might anticipate that future excavation will show similar changes in Scotland.

Given the problems with absolute dating in the early historic period its use is often regarded as secondary in importance to relative dating methods. These rely on the presence of Roman artefacts, fine metalwork, imported glass, Mediterranean and Gaulish pottery and, as discussed above, documentary sources. But in the absence of a coin-using economy, many of these can only be broadly dated themselves and tend to have limited geographical and chronological applicability. Few artefacts can be independently dated from the 4th to 7th centuries (a problem exacerbated by quirks in the C-14 curve that result in an apparently underpopulated late 4th to early 6th century). A notable exception is a unique

decorated brooch from a well-dated pre-7th-century stratigraphic context at Scalloway. Roman artefacts are little help given their date range and propensity to be (re-)deposited in later levels. Some fine metalwork belongs to a slightly later period (certain penannular brooch and stick-pin types, as well as more unusual items such as silver tableware, scabbard fittings or reliquaries). Not only scarce, these are rarely found in a stratified context during the course of excavation (13). Moulds and other evidence for fine metalworking from stratified and C-14-dated contexts reveal the profound limitations of dating on typological grounds alone (see below).

More mundane objects such as handmade pottery tend to be produced locally and to have a restricted distribution (this was apparently a cultural choice since we know from metalworking debris that ceramic technology was highly developed). The first possible evidence for the use of a wheel to throw, and certainly to finish, vessels has been discovered at the Howe, Orkney. Until recently there was little scientific work on identifying and dating early historic pottery styles, but now distinctive, albeit localized products, have been identified in the northern Hebrides (the so-called Hebridean Plain Style, dating to c. 400–800), where dating of the charred contents of vessels is helping to refine our understanding of typologies (Campbell 2002), and Orkney, but there is little work as yet on the contribution of this work to our understanding of how people lived.

With the occasional notable exception, such as a finding of a piece of 6th-century Anglo-Saxon metalwork from South Leckaway in Angus (2003), early historic activity is nigh-on impossible to discover through fieldwalking. A welcome new trend is the increasing recognition and reporting of fragmentary and sometimes highly significant metalwork by metal-detectorists (14). Regrettably, as with new sculpture findspots, archaeologists are rarely following these up on the ground to establish their context.

In general there is scope for far more research on early medieval artefacts of all types, including sculpture. In a similar vein there is much more that might be achieved by examining human skeletal remains of early medieval peoples to determine health, physique, medical practices (such as the possible trepanation noted at Hallow Hill, Fife), and where people come from and have been brought up (through isotopic analysis).

There are no grounds for expecting a one-to-one relationship between ethnicity and material culture, which means that it can be difficult, if not impossible, to identify which people, bearing which particular identity, lived where at any one period in time. In the case of the Picts and Dál Riata it is also clear that a large element of their cultural repertoire seems to be shared between themselves and their neighbours. The application of ethnic labels to artefact types is therefore inadvisable. The only sustainable exception appears to be the so-called



13 The Aldclune brooch: this early-9th-century cast-silver brooch with glass insets was found in Perth and Kinross during the course of an excavation. It overlay a fortified site of the earlier 1st millennium and may have derived from a later settlement, or possibly a burial (NMS).



14 An example of a recent metal-detecting find: a copper-alloy enamelled, 8th-century decorative mount from Viewfield, Lhanbryde, now in Elgin Museum (enlarged) (NMS).

Art history

Art-historical evidence for the Picts and Dál Riata comprises not so much a different resource, as an application of a different set of skills and approaches to aspects of the archaeological record, specifically decorated objects. Very few upstanding buildings of this period survive and they lack closely datable architectural details. The key sources in early medieval Scotland are therefore manuscripts (mainly the Book of Kells) (15), metalwork and the associated evidence for its manufacture, and sculpture. Pictish sculpture has been described by Henderson (1967) as 'the only substantial native relic' although in its time fine metalwork production may have been the more prevalent and significant craft (Cramp 1997). Style and decoration can provide a framework for dating while analysis of design, symbolism, form, craftsmanship, function and use have the potential to provide information about the negotiation of social relations and the places such activities took place: the nature of human contact and communication, religious ideals, political aspirations, cultural contacts and intellectual awareness. The importance of recognizing where things come from and what this context can tell us is also becoming more widely recognized. It is at this level that the full potential of art history is realized and its discoveries can be related to historical developments.

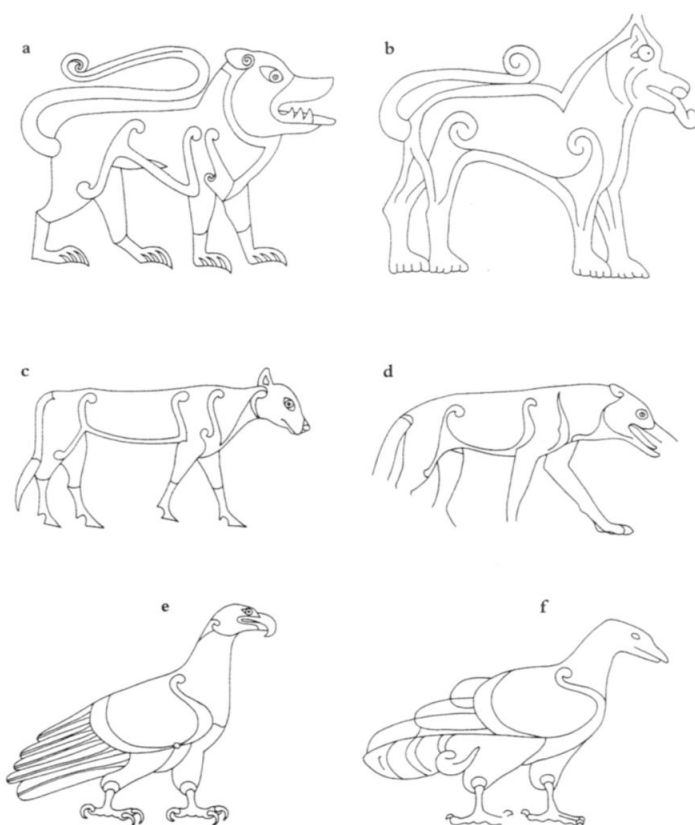
Analysis of style and motifs for dating purposes has always to be the first step. This is not easy. It relies on the construction of a dating framework that is keyed into 'known' horizons (such as the date of production of a particular manuscript), to which other objects are then related, either earlier or later, by expert consensus. But the experts are not always agreed about the date and origin of their points of reference, not least since craftspeople and their products (with the obvious exception of most sculpture) travelled widely. For example, the animal and abstract-symbol designs of some Pictish carvings belong stylistically with Irish and English metalwork, manuscript decoration and sculpture of the 7th and 8th centuries (16). But not only are the dates of some manuscripts unresolved, there is also disagreement about which directions influence went in; hence the date of Pictish symbols is also disputed (chapter 5). There is wider agreement that Christianity opened up the network by which such contacts were made.

Pictish symbols, defined as Pictish by virtue of their date and broad geographical location. However, these are not found in all areas that are assumed to have been Pictish at some time (in itself not surprising given the long tradition of a distinction between the west coast and islands from the east side of Scotland). Other categories of artefacts to which an ethnic label was previously applied have now been shown not to be exclusively Pictish in a geographical and/or chronological sense – respectively the so-called Pictish brooches and Pictish painted pebbles.



15 Book of Kells: Christ enthroned and attended by angels. At one time this manuscript had an ornate gold cover (perhaps a gift from a 9th- or 10th-century royal donor) but this was stolen in 1007. Significant human resources and technical skills, including chemistry, were required to create such splendid manuscripts (The Board of Trinity College Dublin). A leather satchel from Loch Glashan crannog in Argyll is of a size to have held a book like this.

Another reason why the origins of an object may be uncertain is because Ireland and Britain were highly interdependent in their artistic styles and influences at this time in all media – hence the term 'Insular' is used to describe it. Pictish symbols are the only element of the repertoire not generally found outside Pictland. Long disputed is the date and place of origin of the Book of Kells. On various grounds scholars have previously put forward



16 Comparison of animals on Insular manuscripts and Pictish carvings: (a) lions from the Book of Durrow and (b) from Papil (in reverse); (c) calf from the Echternach Gospels and (d) wolf from Andross; (e) eagles from the Corpus Christi College MS 197B and (f) Knowe of Burrian.

arguments for its production in a scriptorium in Kells (Ireland), Lindisfarne (Northumbria) and eastern Pictland, although Iona (and c. 800) is currently the dominant choice (Meehan 1994). The influence of Pictish and Northumbrian art is not surprising since the book was produced during a period when Insular art was already in a mature phase in all media and when there was plenty of scope for the peaceful integration and sharing of ideas.

The same problem applies to fine metalwork, little of which has been found in Scotland (where it was not buried with the dead and was rarely hoarded) and only a small portion of which is definitely of Pictish manufacture (17). Through the sculpture we see evidence for some of the metalwork and manuscripts that must have been in contemporary circulation. Metalworking moulds provide the best (and only dated) evidence for where specific objects were produced, and where on the ground different styles met and developed. Key sites include Mote of Mark in Dumfries and Galloway, and

Dunadd in Argyll and Bute, where direct evidence for all elements of the Insular art style – Irish, Pictish and Saxon – is to be found, requiring the role of Argyll and Iona in the development of Insular manuscripts to be rethought. There is also evidence here for the production of La Tène-style art (associated with the Iron Age culture of the pre-Roman Celts of north-western Europe) some 500 or so years later than anticipated, which has interesting implications for the art of the Pictish symbols. A further caution for art historians is the wide variation in types of decoration prevalent at any one time.

As in other aspects of early medieval studies there is a renaissance of interest in Insular art, as evidenced by the four international conferences on the subject since 1987 (most recently Redknapp *et al.* eds 2001). The approaches taken by the art historians are increasingly inter-disciplinary and have also broadened both in their technique and in their philosophy. However, there is as yet no readily accessible and reliable introduction to early medieval art in Scotland (but see Henderson & Henderson forthcoming). To compound matters, there is also no modern comprehensive catalogue of the corpus of early medieval sculpture, or indeed of contemporary metalwork (Youngs 1989 is the best starting point).

Place names

Through analysis of their distribution in time and space, place names can provide a unique insight into the nature of society: people's beliefs and world-view; social, religious, and political structures and affiliation; the use and organization of the wider landscape (e.g. land tenure, land management and agricultural practices, routeways); and uses of specific places (e.g. settlements, sacred sites). The scope for fruitful symbiosis between archaeologists and toponymists is enormous, not least to test some of the cautious new ideas about historical events and processes that are arising from place-name studies, particularly the work of Simon Taylor and Thomas Clancy on saints' dedications and early church sites (chapter 5). The names on modern

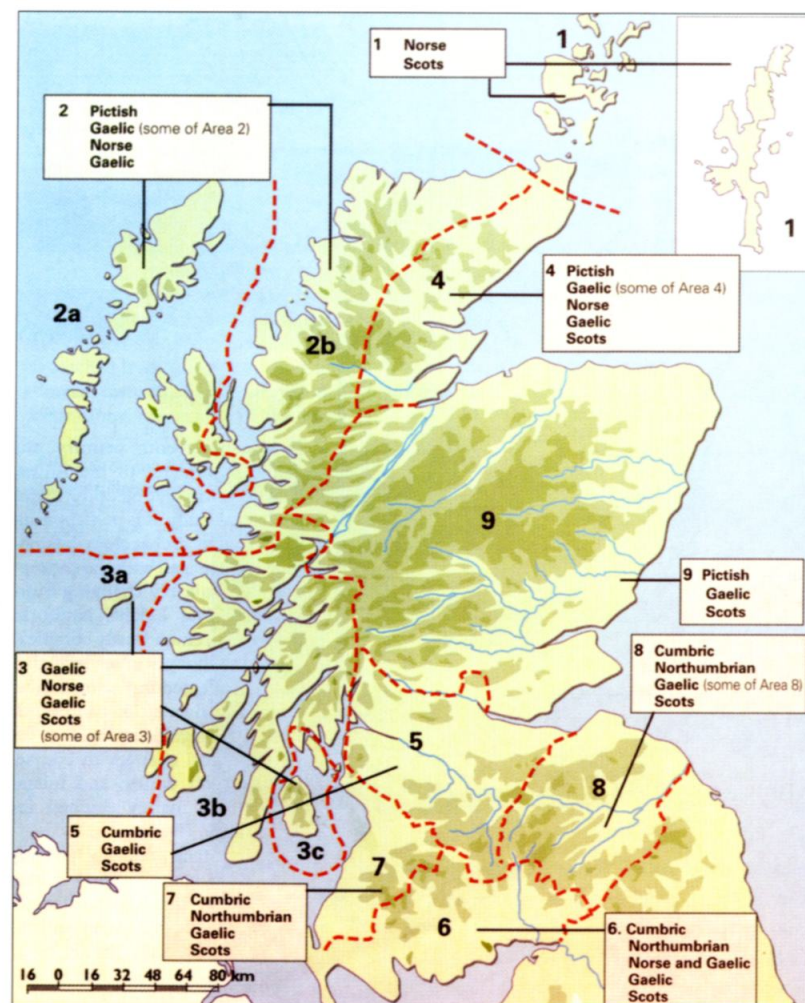
Ordnance Survey maps need to be taken back to their earliest forms in order to establish first their language, then (we hope) their meaning. This is a difficult task in Scotland where so many languages have been used, sometimes in quick succession, yet much success has been achieved by examining local pronunciations and the early written records. But the earliest dated form of a name (unlikely to pre-date 12th-century Anglo-Norman influence) can only give a rough indication of its pronunciation in the time before which the written form must have been created. Therefore names are also dated by looking at, among other things, the language in which they were coined, their geographical situation or embedded personal names, and how these relate to the known political scene. For example, a Scandinavian personal name will indicate that it is not any earlier than the late 8th century, although its inclusion in a place name need not imply that the creator was actually Scandinavian, or that the place was a part of mainstream Scandinavian settlement.

A range of Pictish, Scandinavian and Gaelic place-name elements have been identified that have a direct bearing on the analysis of Pictish and Dál Riata settlement. Examination of their geographical distribution is most illuminating, albeit problematic, since analysis must consider not only when the names were created but when and why they may (or may not) have ceased to be used (18; Taylor 2001).

By far the largest part of Scotland is covered with the Gaelic names in *baile* ('a habitation', becomes Bal-) and *achadh* (literally 'field', but subsequently applied to secondary settlements, becomes Ach- or Auch-). *Baile* is suggested to be an accurate toponymic marker for the area of permanent settlement of Gaelic speakers in Scotland, and includes those Pictish areas that were subsumed after the Dál Riata takeover in the mid-9th century. Taylor (1997) suggests that certain elements, especially Pit- (estate, land-holding) and Bal- names were originally not fixed parts of a place name, but could be used interchangeably depending on which aspect of a settlement the name-users wished to



17 Fortunately a lot of fine Insular metalwork is found in Scandinavian graves, including this bucket, possibly of Pictish or west Scottish manufacture, from Skei, Norway (Graham-Campbell 2001; Per E Fredriksen, NTNU, Museum of Natural History and Archaeology, Trondheim, Norway).



18 The different toponymic regions of Scotland, indicating the main languages of each as reflected in local place names. © Simon Taylor/History Scotland

in an area known to be Pictish and where it survives as **dol* or **dul* – and place names that were coined later by non-Pictish speakers using Pictish loan-words – such as those including the elements *pett* (with over 300 examples, as in Pitmedden or Pitcaple), or **carden* ('enclosure'). Names with *pett* (usually Pit- in modern Scots and English) are fairly extensive but contrary to earlier suggestions their distribution cannot be interpreted as more or less identical to the settlement area of the historical Picts. This place-name element is not found in those areas of former Pictland that were subsequently inhabited by the Scandinavians and, as Taylor (1997) suggests, this is because they were being coined in the early stages of the expansion of Alba after 900 (most of the Pit- names have a Gaelic second element).

We have now seen why this period can be described as 'early historic'. While we still need to harken to A O Anderson's 1940 warning that 'he who is determined to write history in literary form should avoid the early history of Scotland' this is no excuse for not putting forward models that seek to explain the bigger picture on the basis of the much wider range of evidence now available. The next four chapters are structured around the main arenas in and through which power appears to have been articulated in early historic Scotland. This is a convenient intellectual device by which to seek to explain one set of preferred views on what seems to have happened, and to cover the range of available evidence on which any such interpretation is based. Readers are encouraged to use the list of Further Reading to explore the ideas and test the evidence upon which this particular overview is based.

The residence of power

The evolving nature of kingship holds the key to the main historical developments of the early historic period. In Pictland the 5th to 9th centuries witnessed a gradual move away from petty kingdoms towards the increasing centralization of authority over far-flung territories, however nominal this authority might be in practice. Identifying how this happened and when the key stages in this process took place is crucial. These stages are essentially developments in the history of kings and nobles, individuals who acquired and wielded authority by creating and maintaining imbalances in power between individuals and different groups of people. It is these relations of power that we need to try to elucidate if we are to unravel meaning from the past. Successful leaders are likely to have combined the ability to exploit resources to create surplus goods with a belief system that sanctioned and legitimized their position, with effective military organization, and with the administrative means to control expanding territories. In practice these areas of activity are inextricably entwined and impossible to disentangle, but the following different sources of power can be examined: political (below); economic (chapter 4); ideological (chapter 5); and military (chapter 6). We should remember throughout, however, that 'societies are much messier than our theories of them' (Mann 1986).

Politics here involves a 'top-down' approach or exploration of the structure and organization of society, particularly the nature of kingship, complemented by the archaeological evidence for power centres. Chapter 4 takes the opposite approach, looking at the organization of the land – the ultimate source of all power – and the ability of potentates to exploit its agricultural potential and control its inhabitants. From this we can begin to piece together a picture of the wider landscape in which society operated and the role that power centres played in controlling and shaping this. Using the top-down approach we can begin to define the levels and scales of society at which we might expect to encounter power centres; suggest the range of likely associated activities; and provide a political and ideological framework within which to consider them.

The structure of society

The early historic period is characterized throughout the British Isles by the emergence of warlike, heroic kings who ruled over defined territories (even though we may not now be able to identify their precise boundaries). A broadly similar arrangement in this respect seems to have developed in both Argyll and Pictland. In part this trend stems from the impact of the Roman withdrawal, and with it the cessation of the formal government and social order with which much of Britain was by then familiar, either directly or indirectly. In the absence of any central authority, local aristocrats began to compete for access to wealth and political prestige, which they could master by access to material resources and

the use of violence and personal charisma. Scottish tribes had long since developed into sophisticated social groups, which in some cases had apparently established contacts with other British tribes during the Roman period, if not before. Although we can question the impact of Roman withdrawal on much of Scotland where Roman direct influence was minimal and/or short-lived, some tribes do appear at the very least to have allied with each other during the Roman period in an attempt to oppose a common enemy. This wider alliance may have broken down into smaller groupings once the threat disappeared; distant intertribal relationships must also have been affected.

Territories began to become more formal because they were the areas within which leaders could protect people and grant them the rights to land. Their (flexible) extent was defined by the radius of a potentate's authority. Hand in hand with the growth of these territories went a fluid transition from a 'tribal' society, in which kin-based relations were predominant, to an early 'state' organization, in which society was more institutionalized and hierarchical, and relations of clientship became increasingly important. 'Tribal' and 'state' are value-laden terms that mean different things to different people, and in between which (whatever one's definition) are different levels of development and complexity. Without wishing to be too precise about either Pictish or Dál Riata society (in so far as precision is possible at all), the important fact is that clientship was a means of extending the distance over which relations of authority could successfully operate, and it facilitated the establishment of new élites whose authority might be acquired rather than inherited by right.

At its simplest, clientship (as described in contemporary Irish laws) generally consisted of the payment of a range of food renders or other tribute and services (labour and military) to a lord in return for land to farm, protection and patronage, a chain of relationships that included all levels of society. At the top of the chain were nobles, clergy and kings, potentates (usually men) who were both socially and geographically mobile; power was exchanged between them through agreed modes of inheritance and/or aggression. Authority was determined by the number and type of clients one could support, which was ultimately dependent on the ability to exploit the agricultural resources of the land. The size of territories expanded when the lord of one area accepted the authority of another; physical conflict resulted when two authorities could not accept which was the stronger, and this appears to have been a frequent occurrence.

But however many levels of lordship existed, the primary economic unit was the individual household or family, and this continued to be the case throughout the period. Contemporary Ireland was divided into *tuatha*, tribes or territories consisting of large groupings of households that were ruled by a king supported by a retinue of specialist staff; kings of individual *tuatha* owed their allegiance to kings of groups of *tuatha*, who in turn owed their allegiance to kings of provinces and, ultimately, to the king of all Ireland. As J Campbell (1979) says, 'this was a world in which there were hierarchies of kings and relativities of kingliness'. With time the geographical extent of certain kings' authority expanded as power became increasingly centralized. But in the absence of certain resources and technologies there was inevitably a limit to the geographical extent over which authority could effectively operate, as we shall see. Examination of the historical sources provides clues to the extent and progression of the territories, the nature of kingship and the relationship between kings.

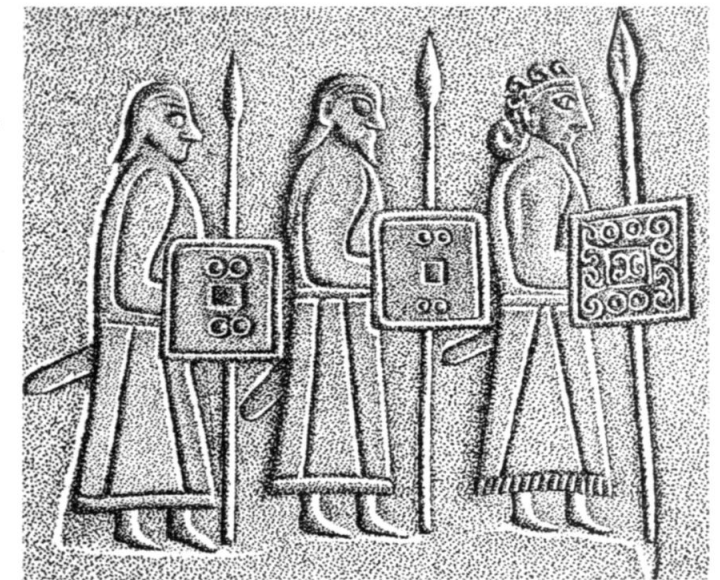
Territorial divisions

Historical sources suggest that stable political entities had developed from the Iron Age tribes described by Classical authors, perhaps as early as the middle of the 6th century. A distinction between a northern and southern Pictish zone can be traced for most of Pictland's history. As Fraser (2003) reinforces, the Mounth is a significant boundary, but he suggests that the area to the south can be divided into two along the approximate line of the Gask Ridge/Tay, an interesting idea that requires further investigation. Bridei son of Mailcon is described in the late 6th century as *rex potentissimus* (a most powerful, or very powerful, king) and as having held the hostages of an Orcadian *regulus* at his court. This may mean that Bridei's power nominally extended throughout northern Pictland. Fraser makes the interesting

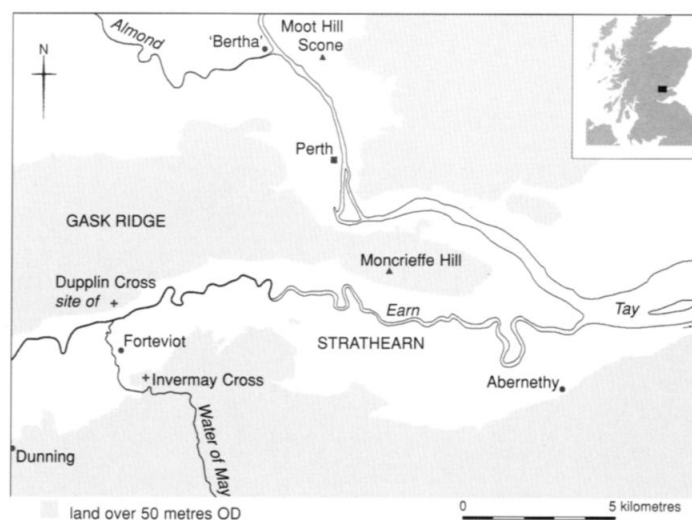
suggestion that Bridei's main Caledonian political stronghold was in fact around the Tay, rather than the Inverness area, as most scholars have assumed. The 13th-century *De Situ Albanie* has lost its credibility as a plausible source for a map of seven alleged Pictish regions (Broun 2000). The political landscape north of the Mounth is 'impenetrably obscure' apart from the mention of *Cait* (Caithness). With the exception of the reference to Orkney mentioned above, we simply do not know how northern and western Scotland, including the islands, fitted into this picture. South of the Mounth, however, we can suggest that this area became sub-divided into the regions of Gowrie and Angus, Atholl (note the mention of a 'king of Atholl' in 739) and Mearns.

South of the Tay, according to Fraser, we can envisage a Verturian territory comprising at least Strathearn and Fife with a centre at Stirling. Within this area the extent of various saints' cults may provide clues to the various polities that existed (Driscoll 2002). The king of this area came to be known as the king of Fortriu (20) and by the late 7th century this term becomes synonymous with the king of all Pictland as these Verturian (*Fortrenn*) kings extended their authority into the northern zone and actively promoted the concept of a single Pictish kingdom with a single king (*rex Pictorum*) and a single Pictish people (the process of ethnogenesis – see also Woolf 2001a). While this new political entity was recognized by neighbouring countries, nonetheless the writings of both Adomnán and Bede still acknowledge the existence in some vestigial way of a north/south distinction. The Pictish achievement was that overlordship of such a far-flung collection of people could become a reality, however nominal that authority might actually be in practice.

We might therefore presume that there was for some time an undefined, extensive network of 'sub-kings'. How and if these regions and their leaders relate to the *toíseach* (leader of a kindred) and *mormaer* (predominant *toíseach* in charge of a large region



19 Carving of three warriors on a slab from the Brough of Birsay. Differences in dress, weapons and hairstyle distinguish the man at the front, who is presumably the leader, and possibly the descendant of the late 6th-century *regulus* mentioned by Adomnán.



20 Location map of key sites in the heart of Strathearn. In early Pictish times the main seat of Fortriu may have been the fort on Moncrieffe Hill. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved Historic Scotland Licence No. 100017509 2004

collect dues. The date of the creation of this system (as opposed to its terminology, which is late) is therefore very important because we can see that it would have been a means by which kings could extend their authority to new territories.

The Dál Riata straddled both sides of the North Channel until at least the mid-8th century (Dumville 2002). Historical sources suggest that lands of the Dál Riata in Scotland extended from the Mull of Kintyre to Ardnamurchan and Morvern (part of modern Highland) and included the islands of the west coast, Arran and Bute, although Skye and the Western Isles are probably best described as Pictish, while to the east 'the mountains of the spine of Britain' (*Druim n'Alban*) are the boundary. By Sharpe's analysis (2000), the Dál Riata chiefly comprised two related groups of people or kindreds: the Cenél nGabráin (in Kintyre and Knapdale with a centre at Dunadd) and Cenél Comgaill (in Cowal). The *Míniugud Senchasa Fher n'Alban* mentions two non-royal additions, the Cenél Loairn (Lorn, with a centre at Dunollie) and Cenél nOengusa (Islay). Cenél nGabráin was the dominant lineage, despite temporary loss of the kingship to the Cenél Loairn in the early 8th century and to the Picts from 741–50. These hiccups aside, and contrary to earlier analyses, Sharpe argues that the nGabráin line retained a remarkable hold on the kingship over a long period and confined royal succession to a far narrower range of kinship than was normal in Ireland. No sub-kings are known and much of the strength of the Dál Riata must reside in this long and relatively stable dynasty.

Patterns of inheritance

Understanding how kingship passed between generations has a direct bearing on how control over territories might change and transfer between people of different races. In the case of the Dál Riata, this is understood by some to have been by tanistry (as in Ireland), where successors were nominated from alternating eligible kin groups (but see above on the dominance of

equivalent to a later earldom) known to have existed at later times in parts of Alba is not known. These were people who collected dues and renders on their own behalf, rather than as royal agents (Broun forthcoming). The role of the *toíseach* can seemingly be contrasted with that of a thane, the title of a royal official probably introduced in the early 11th century by Mael-Coluim mac Cinaeda (Malcolm II) to manage a land unit (thaneage) about the size of a parish. Their role as royal officials was to lead people in war, supervise justice and organize payment of renders and dues to the king or to an earl, having first taken their own share. Their role may have been similar to that of the *exactatores*, men who died in battle with Nechtan in 729, perhaps in the course of attempting to

Cenél nGabráin), often in advance of the death of the king. In the case of kings, where intermarriage between dynasties or races was a common political gesture, this meant the continual growth of the kin group from which a successor might be selected, as well as the likely inclusion of 'outsiders'. In addition, reigns tended to be short, a testimony to the violent hazards of kingship. The outcome of this was that sons rarely inherited from their fathers.

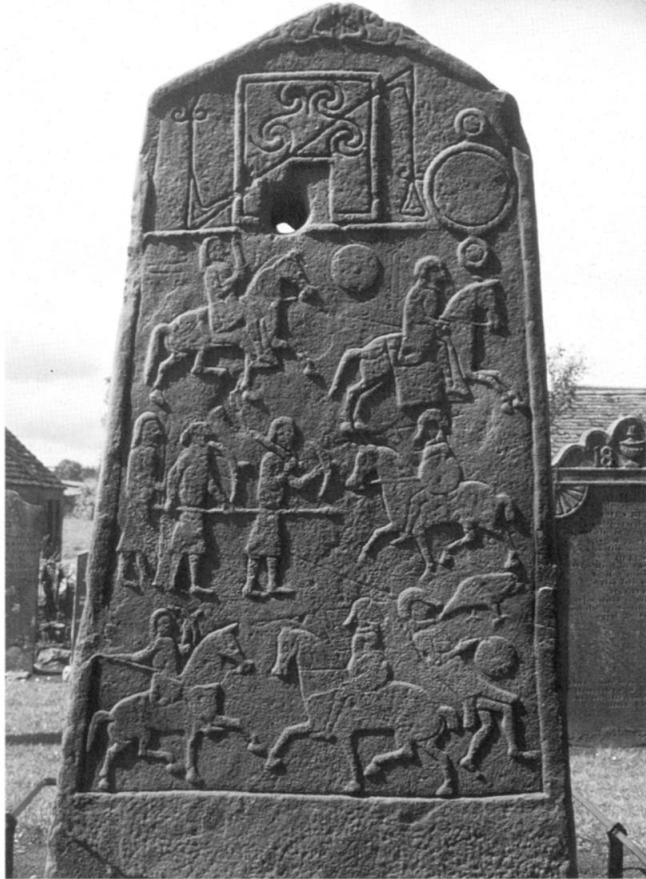
The Picts have been thought by some to have followed the practice of succession through the female rather than the male line, in distinction to all their British neighbours. The argument stems from Bede's statement that, because the Picts took their wives from among the Gaels, they acceded to the Gaels' request that whenever a dispute over kingship arose the Picts should give preference to the 'female royal line'; the resulting practice is supported by a later medieval Irish legend. Supporters of this view argue that before 780 no Pictish king is known to have been the son of another king and that the relationship between a number of 7th-century Pictish, Northumbrian and British kings can be interpreted as evidence for matrilineal succession in Pictland. The argument for matriliney has often also been justified by the supposed existence in Pictland of a pre-Celtic non-Indo-European language, but as discussed in chapter 2, it has recently been convincingly argued that the Picts' language was a Brittonic Celtic one, from the same family as Welsh.

Recent work by Alex Woolf (1998) and Alasdair Ross (1999) convincingly counters the matriliney hypothesis. No other early historic sources refer to this unusual marriage practice, and Pictish kings are referred to as 'son of' their fathers. Bede actually states that the Picts would only rely on inheritance through the female line in *exceptional* circumstances, a practice seemingly followed by other British dynasties. It is no coincidence that Bruide son of Derilei (696–706) and his brother and successor Nechtan son of Derilei (706–724) claimed their right to the kingship of Fortriu through their Pictish mother. Bede's early 8th-century statement (thought to derive from a Gaelic origin story) is therefore undoubtedly a reflection of Pictish propaganda that sought to justify the current position, and Northumbrian support for this situation. The evidence for patrilineal inheritance is, however, equally weak, and a model analogous to that used by the Dál Riata to select their kings is most probable. Patterns of succession did change with the accession of Cinaed mac Ailpín in 842/3: although direct patrilineal succession was not immediate, kingship was more tightly confined to the immediate family of his descendants.

Political context

Picts, Dál Riata, Britons, Angles and eventually Vikings all extended their territories within or into northern Britain. In many instances their aim may merely have been the extortion of tribute from subjected peoples outside their immediate kingdoms, but there were also more permanent shifts in territories. The ebb and flow of their respective successes provides a political framework without which we cannot understand how Pictland and Argyll came to be amalgamated.

Political links between Picts and Dál Riata possibly began in the late 6th century, when a Pictish king called Gartnait may in fact have been a Gael. It certainly appears that the Dál Riata had their eyes on expansion into Pictland from an early date; they showed a particular interest in the northerly zone from 581–682, according to events recorded in the annals.



21 Reverse of the cross-slab at Aberlemno churchyard (see 85), interpreted as a depiction of the battle of Dunnichen (Crutskhank 2000). The Anglian king Ecgrifh is distinguished from the Picts by his helmet, similar to one found at Coppergate, York. From top to bottom: Ecgrifh flees from Bridei, dropping his sword and shield; Ecgrifh is opposed by foot-soldiers defended with shields, lance and spear; Bridei and Ecgrifh oppose each other in battle; Ecgrifh is killed (symbolized by the raven eating his corpse).

The main aggressors against the Dál Riata appear to have been the British of Strathclyde who reached the height of their power in the 7th century and, along with the Angles, also regularly competed for Pictish overlordship. From 631–53 there appear to have been three Pictish kings of British descent, but from 653–85 Pictland was under Anglian domination, primarily through puppet kings. In 672 one of these (Drest) was expelled by the Picts but, in retaliation, the Anglian king Ecgrifh massacred a Pictish army and with it many of the Pictish aristocracy. Bridei son of Beli, a Pict possibly with a British father and brought up in the Northumbrian court, stepped into the power vacuum and under his leadership the Angles were routed in 685 at the battle of Dunnichen in Angus (Anglian *Nechtanessmere*, Pictish *Linn Garan*; 21). In the five years or so prior to Dunnichen there is evidence for a period of instability, in which Bridei attacked forts at Dunnottar in Aberdeenshire and Dundurn in Perthshire and Kinross, and 'the Orkneys were destroyed'. We see evidence here for Bridei's active and conscious programme of consolidation and extension of his authority as he creates the concept of

a single Pictish province and people, an initiative that his successors were able to follow up in a range of different ways; according to Bede, Ecgrifh attacked Pictland because Bridei had been paying tribute to Northumbria to this point but stopped doing so. Ecgrifh's defeat had implications for all the inhabitants of northern Britain.

The Pictish king Onuist son of Uurguist (729–61) can perhaps be credited with beginning a dynasty that ruled until 839 (Broun 1998). One of the most powerful and successful Pictish kings, after capturing the stronghold of Dunadd he also appears to have been briefly overlord of Dál Riata.

The 9th century brought profound change. The Dál Riata were under pressure on their west from Vikings, who were also attacking the Picts from the east. Pictland's leaders were apparently killed in 839 after a particularly vicious episode, and the dynasty of Fortriu was at an end. Cinaed mac Ailpín and his descendants exploited the ensuing chaos and disruption to introduce both themselves and a new political structure into Pictland.

The character of kingship

The changing character of kingship during this period goes some way to explaining how more permanent structures of government came into existence, as well as the role that the introduction of Christianity played in developing this and the nature of society as a whole. To judge from what we know of Celtic societies elsewhere, pre-Christian kings in Scotland were sacral beings who played a unique role in intervening between people and their gods – beliefs that were enshrined in mythology. They were able to do this through the possession of certain magical supernatural powers, but were likely to have been aided

by a retinue (usually male): priests (or druids) with control over natural and extra-natural powers (note the shamanistic qualities of some of the human figures that the Picts incised on stones: Ritchie 2003); poets who were responsible, among other things, for the cultivation of genealogy and origin legends; and soothsayers who dispensed law (Anne Ross 1995). Ritual would typically have been associated with the king's role, particularly at inauguration ceremonies. To judge from later Irish sources, these involved a heavy reference to the king's relationship to the gods and his capacity to confer fertility upon the people, with whom his greatness was identified. It seems likely that the Christian church would have had to work hard to amend such beliefs and practices.

With one possible exception, no records of Pictish or Dál Riata inauguration ceremonies survive. However, certain sites and features have been associated with them. From Irish research (FitzPatrick 2003) it can be inferred that carved stone footprints, stone chairs, rock-cut basins and certain stone slabs are associated with medieval inauguration sites and traditions. The best-known Scottish example comes from within the fort of Dunadd where, by the entrance to the early historic inner citadel, are a series of carvings, specifically two carved footprints, a rock-cut bowl and a natural formation possibly used as a seat (22). This is one of the many reasons for identifying this site as a chief seat or principal royal centre of Dál Riata. Given the location immediately outside what had been the Iron Age core of the site, there is a possibility that these features were carved before the early historic period (note also the stone with two footprints from the Iron Age broch at Clickhimin, Shetland, although this too could well belong to a later period). The proximity of another footprint at Southend in Kintyre (Argyll and Bute) to the presumed early historic fort at Dunaverty should also be noted. At Dunadd, the later additions of an inscribed boar and 9th/10th-century ogham inscription suggest that the significance of these features was still recognized at a time when northern Britain was certainly Christian. Nonetheless, continued pagan practice is a strong possibility as ritual representations of status do not necessarily change with new belief systems. Christian monarchs continued to emphasize their descent from pagan gods and consciously reinforced their position in society by reference to pagan practices, including the selection of sacred hilltops for their power centres. The footprint carvings are permanent features, carved from the living rock, perhaps emphasizing the direct association of a king with the mother earth. The seating of Scottish rulers on the 'Stone of Destiny' on the 'Hill of Faith' at Scone in Perth and Kinross is a late survival of this type of fertility rite. As well as being strategically located, inauguration sites, such as Dunadd, were often also situated on boundaries where people from different groups could meet to witness the transfer or acceptance of authority between their leaders.

With the advent of Christianity, the nature of kingship was redefined, although kings still maintained a role as regulators of the laws and customs of their people. In theory, the Church now interceded on behalf of a king and his people, and clerics across Europe began to play a key role in inauguration, but in practice, some kings acquired saintly attributes and continued to be considered sacred in their own right, in death if not in life. Similarly, we see evidence for Christian cults developing around saints who stemmed from specific royal kindreds. Inauguration ceremonies were of both political and religious significance. Since no king succeeded to his throne as a matter of course it helped to have



22 Rock surface with footprint at Dunadd fort, thought to be used for royal inauguration.

23 Main panel from the St Andrews Sarcophagus. At the centre a mounted Pictish king attacks a lion in part of a woodland hunting scene. To the right the large figure of the biblical King David (identified by his ram and dog) defends his flock from another lion. The underlying message is that heavenly salvation is obtainable through the right behaviour of strong kings who defend the Christian faith.



the legitimization that the Church could provide. This phenomenon is seen throughout contemporary Europe, but the first recorded Christian ordination of a king reputedly took place in 574 at Iona in Argyll. Adomnán describes how Columba, who had first brought Christianity to Argyll, ordained Aedán mac Gabráin. There is some debate as to whether this took place. If it did, it may have been a conscious attempt by Aedán to enforce his legitimacy by seeking, through Columba, an alliance with the saint's powerful relatives, the Uí Néill dynasty of Ireland. In performing this secular ordination, Columba would have been mirroring the 'divine' ordination that had led to the choice of Aedán rather

than his brother as king. However, an alternative view argues convincingly that this event did not take place at all. Although the monastery at Iona may incorporate Iron Age earthworks, in 574 it was a very recent foundation with no tradition of involvement with tribal rituals and hence an unlikely venue for such an event (Enright 1985).

Adomnán was a very powerful man, head of the largest monastic confederacy and a member (like Columba before him) of the Uí Néill dynasty from which were drawn the high kings of Ireland. As such he had a close involvement in both secular and ecclesiastical

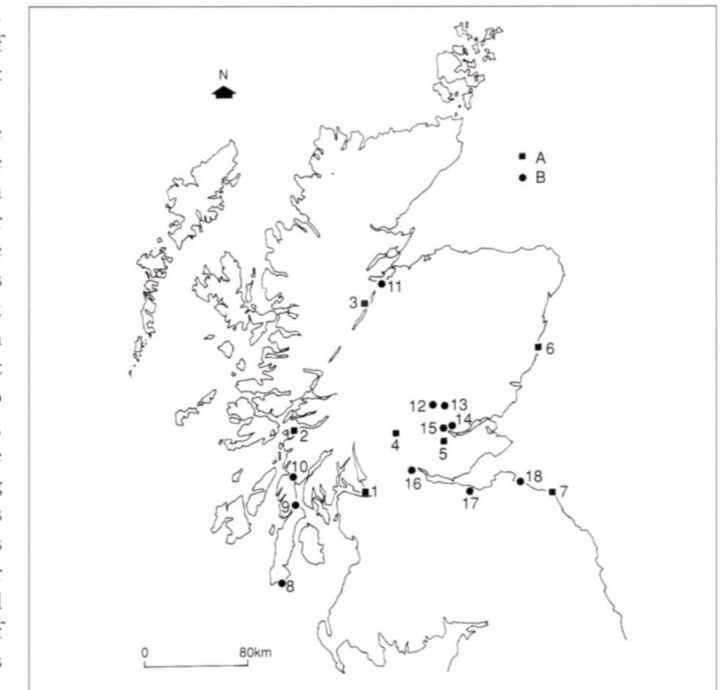
politics and his account may be a very clever piece of propaganda. In inventing an inauguration ritual drawn from Old Testament models, Adomnán was the leading advocate of a school of thought that wanted to change the character and succession practices of kingship (Enright 1985). Not least, he wished to create a more peaceful society in which a king was inviolate, ruled peacefully, and where there was an orderly and legitimate form of succession upon his death (unlike in real life where succession conflicts often led to bloodshed and feud). The school of thought he championed was pervasive and influential throughout Europe, as can be seen in the sculpture of Pictland (with its King David iconography; 23) and Argyll, particularly Iona. A new rite was needed that broke with the past, yet still retained its own 'magic', in order to present the new rituals in a traditional manner. Adomnán's aim could therefore have been to make the point that the decision about who ruled the Dál Riata should rest with Iona/the Uí Néill (because Columba had created the precedent) and hence to strengthen the position of the Church in a more peaceful society.

Power centres

Early historic power centres, both secular and ecclesiastical, can be defined as the places where the people who controlled material resources and technologies lived, and from where resources were administered, collected, transformed and exchanged. Inevitably contemporary perceptions of power centres depended on the standpoint of the observer in the social hierarchy.

Although most power centres are undocumented, some are listed in the surviving documentary sources, which describe the siege, capture, burning or construction of a range of sites (24). Mere mention will usually imply that it was significant in the politics of the time; excavation has verified the identification of some of these sites throughout northern Britain. The sites referred to appear to have been local power bases, associated with the leader of one particular group or people competing with another. Whether these are records of the aggressive activities of warrior kings whose aims were booty and tribute rather than the conquest of territory, or scribal shorthand for shifts in the distribution of authority over the areas and peoples associated with these forts, is unclear.

24 Map of documented early historic forts and other royal sites in Scotland. A. Sites excavated 1974–84 by Leslie and Elizabeth Alcock: 1 Dumbarton, 2 Dunollie, 3 Urquhart, 4 Dundurn, 5 Forteviot, 6 Dunnottar, 7 St Abb's Head; B. Other sites with historical references: 8 Dunaverty, 9 Tarbert, 10 Dunadd, 11 Inverness, 12 Dunkeld, 13 Clunie, 14 Scone, 15 Inverlmond, 16 Stirling, 17 Edinburgh, 18 Dunbar.



The names used for places vary (*dun, urbs, caput regionis*, for example) and, while they defy precise interpretation, often appear to imply a political and administrative role in addition to a strongly defended site. In general the named sites are fortified hilltops or coastal promontories enclosed by timber and stone walls and/or timber palisades.

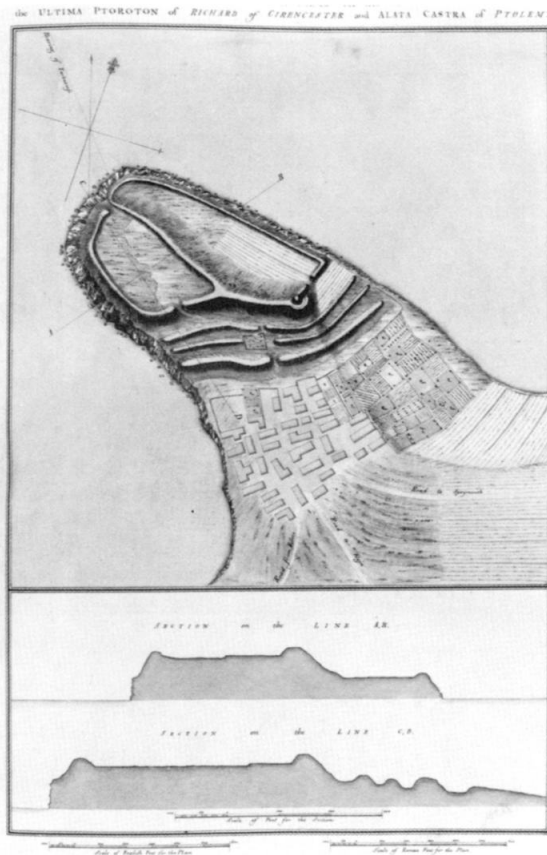
Forts and coastal promontories

What may be one of the earliest power bases in Pictland is also the largest (by a factor of three), the coastal promontory fort at Burghead, Moray (25). The tip of the long headland is cut off by three lines of earth-and-rubble defences of unknown date, but possibly pre-dating an inner fort, first constructed between the 4th and 6th centuries, divided into an upper level (a citadel) and an annexe. The ramparts of this fort were constructed with a timber framework held together with iron spikes, faced by carefully coursed stone, its interior filled with layers of timber, earth and stone, on top of which may have been a wooden superstructure. Timber-laced construction (sometimes surviving as vitrified stone) proves to be common to many early historic fortifications, although iron nails have so far only been recorded here and at Dundurn. Given its undoubted significance and proximity to an excellent anchorage, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was an important naval base for the Picts from as far back as the late Roman period when Pictish sea-borne attacks are recorded; it may even be Ptolemy's *Pinnata Castra*. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the significance of the Pictish fleet diminished with time: Bridei son of Beli 'devastated' Orkney in 681, for example. Burghead itself appears to have been

occupied until the 9th century, when it may have succumbed to Viking raids. Elsewhere in Moray, Aberdeenshire and Angus, coastal promontories have been demonstrated by excavation to date to the 1st millennium BC, or more commonly AD, and these were perhaps also 'home ports' for Pictish fleets, although not all were necessarily of high status. Otherwise, with the exception of *Dun Fother* (Dunnottar) where excavation unfortunately failed to locate any evidence for early historic defences despite its documented sieges of 681 and 694, and its late-9th century destruction, the status of most of these sites is vague. Coastal promontories are also found throughout the Northern Isles and Caithness as well as elsewhere in northern and western Scotland and it is tempting to assume that some of these were not only occupied during the later 1st millennium but were also of significantly high status.

Like most sites north of the Mounth, Burghead does not feature in the surviving annals, but it does share a number of features in common with both documented and possible early historic power centres: the hierarchical use of space, and its cult and later Christian associations.

25 General Roy's plan of Burghead in the late 18th century (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).



Hierarchical use of space

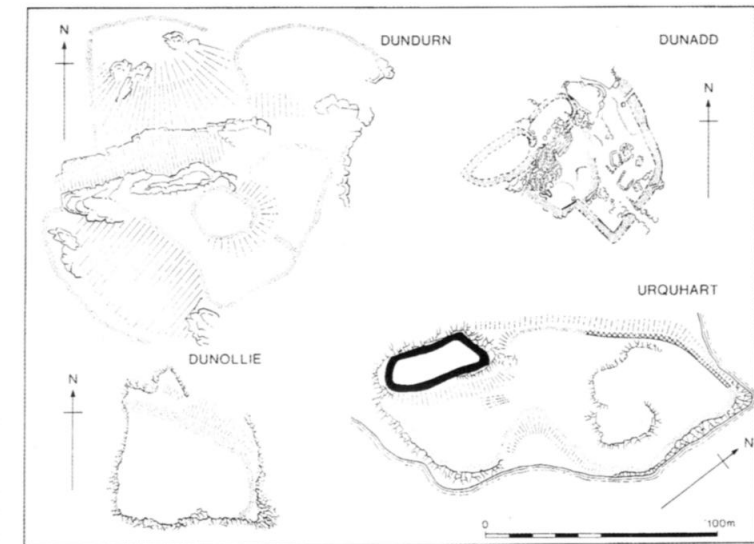
Analysis of the architecture of settlements, and their settings, can often provide valuable insights into the development of society, since buildings were commonly the place where most human activity and social interaction took place. Hierarchically organized fortifications have been recognized as a characteristic feature of Scottish early historic forts as far north as Inverness and as far west as Argyll, although the scale and physical manifestation of these sites may vary (27). Originally thought to have been

constructed as unitary monuments, it is now recognized that although they operated as such, their form represents the culmination of centuries of development. Understanding when this began, and when the forts reached their final form, is therefore significant if we are to learn how territories formed and power became increasingly centralized. While Burghead may have its origins in the 4th century or even earlier, all other dated forts commence in either the 5th, or more usually 6th century, and had only achieved their full hierarchical appearance by the 7th or 8th century. Hills with natural terraces were ingeniously exploited by the erection of a citadel on the highest point, with subsequent enclosures usually attached to it. Dundurn and Dunadd are classic examples of this type of development. At Dundurn (28) the upper terrace was first enclosed during the late 6th/early 7th century by a stout timber stockade, the bedrock having first been grooved in places to receive the timbers. After dismantling, this was replaced by a timber framework (secured by nails) infilled with timber, earth and stone; the recorded siege of 683 may well be the event that led to its destruction by fire. After this, new defences were laid around both the summit and terrace, incorporating masonry robbed from a Roman site about 15 km (9 mi) away. The later phases at both Clatchard Craig and the native fort at Inchtuthil in Perthshire and Kinross also incorporate Roman masonry. We might consider whether stone was now considered more sophisticated, due to its associations with an imperial past. Or did leaders only now have the surplus resources and technology



26 Reconstruction of Dunadd fort by Dave Pollock.

27 Plans of early historic forts (Leslie and Elizabeth Alcock/Society of Antiquaries of Scotland).





28 Dundurn fort from the air.

to expend in the transport of these stones, as a demonstration of their wealth and authority? The close-set nature of the outer multiple ramparts at Clatchard Craig is similar to Burghead, but few potential early historic sites with this feature have been excavated, and it is difficult to distinguish these sites from their Iron Age predecessors, especially where hierarchical use of space is absent.

There was a small Iron Age fort on the summit of Dunadd but most of the visible remains are early historic. A small dun, constructed in around the 4th or 5th century, was expanded sometime in the 6th or 7th century by the addition of a series of enclosing walls. The summit construction was enlarged and a further lower enclosure added in the 8th or 9th century. Little is known of later activity, although royal proclamations were made there as late as 1506. An outstanding range of high status activities took place here: fine metalworking and other craft activities, martial arts (to judge from the unusually large number of weapons) and

trade with continental Europe. The finery of some of the Anglo-Saxon metalwork from the site may even indicate the presence of Bernician royalty.

Early historic forts, which appear to have developed from scratch in this period, also include Dunollie and the British site of *Al Cluith* (Dumbarton Rock, documented between the mid-5th and late-9th centuries). But some forts exploited later prehistoric fortifications, either by refurbishing them (as at Craig Phádraig in Highland, Moncrieffe Hill and presumably Edinburgh Castle) or by the addition of an internal enclosure to a larger, later prehistoric site to create hierarchical use of space. It matters little whether earlier defences were maintained, since their sheer presence would have created the required depth of space. The hierarchy of the space within the site emphasized the status of its inhabitants (in Ireland status was in part dependent on and dictated by the number of defences one could put around one's site), making its appearance more impressive, creating more controls on access through it, and structuring the activities of the people who lived within it. The nature of approaches and the monumentality of entrances were also important, such as at Dunadd (see reconstruction 26).

Cult and Christian associations

We have already seen in western Scotland how a number of sites appear to be associated with inauguration rituals and belief related to Celtic religious practice. In Pictland a number of power centres appear to have either been, or to have had a close association with, religious sites or cult centres, presumably because of the role that kings played in sacred belief and practice. A series of about thirty stone plaques with incised carvings of

bulls were originally found in and around the fort at Burghead, of which only six now survive (29). It is not difficult to suggest a connection between these potent symbols of fertility and ideas of strength and power, the attributes desired by the warlike inhabitants of the fort. Alas, only a small sample of this unique collection now survives, but a single ox-incised plaque was also found on top of the fort at East Lomond in Fife, suggesting similar beliefs existed in southern Pictland. Stones bearing Pictish designs have also sometimes been found in contexts that suggest a ritual or cult focus on or near a high-status site. Most notable is a group of plaques from Dinnacair, a stack site in the immediate vicinity of Dunnottar. The number of animal- and symbol-incised stone slabs, pebbles and bone objects from substantial post-broch or early historic settlements in the northern isles is also on the increase – Gurness and Pool, Orkney and Old Scatness – and we can only begin to speculate as to what this tells us about the status and function of such places.

Further evidence for the likely cult status of Burghead may be seen in the Celtic stone head that was reputedly found in the fort's well, and that may also strengthen the case for the fort having Iron Age origins (30). The 1999 rediscovery at Mine Howe, Orkney, of an elaborate subterranean cistern at the apparent centre of a large, Iron Age ritual complex has awakened archaeologists to the possibility that structures previously thought of as wells, on contemporary 'settlement' sites such as Gurness, also had ritual connotations. Some small structures on sites in northern Scotland are now also being interpreted as possible shrines (Ritchie 2003). Suggestively, the Knowe of Burrian symbol-incised stone was found at the entrance to this Orcadian broch's well (Ritchie 1997). Where caves contain symbols a ritual function can also be inferred, such as at Sculptor's Cave at Covesea only 5 km (3 mi) away from Burghead, or the various caves at East Wemyss, Fife. Covesea also produced Roman artefacts, perhaps gifts to the gods.

We saw earlier how the adoption of Christianity led to the redefinition of kingship and the mutual dependence of ecclesiastical and secular authority. Although no churches have yet been found on Pictish or Dál Riata fortified sites, the close relationship between



29 One of the series of powerful bull carvings from Burghead, markers set into the ground or on top of a wall.



30 Sculpted Celtic head found at Burghead. Note the distinctive drooping moustache, hole in the mouth and almond-shaped eyes (Jill Harden).

the two powers is expressed in their physical proximity: fragments of a shrine suggest that there was a Christian site immediately outside Burghead fort, while the major monastery of Kinnedar is only about 13 km (8 mi) to the east; Mare's Craig, adjacent to Clatchard Craig in Fife, produced evidence for burial in long cists and a bell of 7th- to 9th-century date; there is a sub-circular cemetery with an early carved stone at the foot of Dundurn that must surely have an early Christian origin; and Dunadd is within a few miles of both Kilmartin church – where sculptures suggest an early foundation – and Kilmichael Glassary, the likely findspot of an early Christian iron bell.

Use of Roman sites

Unlike Birdswald, a Roman fort on Hadrian's Wall occupied by a British potentate in the post-Roman period, there is no direct evidence for the continued settlement of Roman fortifications in Scotland, although agricultural settlement activity in their vicinity is attested, as at Kintore in Aberdeenshire. In general the Roman forts were probably too large for early historic leaders to defend, and lacked an elevated situation. One possible exception is Rathinveramon, where two 9th- and 10th-century kings died. The rare use of the element *rath* in this name implies an earth bank and ditch, in which case the Roman fort now known as Bertha, at the mouth of the River Almond in Perth and Kinross and adjacent to the site of the presumed Roman bridge across the Tay, may be a likely candidate. Given the late reference to the site, it may have more in common with the unfortified site at Forteviot (also in Perth and Kinross) than earlier defensive sites, and may only have been sited adjacent to the fort. A number of Pictish power centres are juxtaposed with Roman sites since both were carefully located at nodal points along communication routes – note the apparent concentration of power centres in the area near Perth (Scone and Rathinveramon, perhaps the same as Cinnbealathoir) – and Roman roads survived in use during this period, as hinted at by the location of 10th-century battles (Hudson 1998).

31 General Roy's late-18th-century plan of the Roman and native fort at Inchtuthil (above 'New Inch Stuthill'), Perth and Kinross. Post-Roman circular burial monuments are depicted at 'Women's Knowe' (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).



We cannot rule out the possibility that some native sites exploited the physical presence of the upstanding Roman earthworks. The clearest suggestions of this emerge at Inchtuthil (31) where at one end of the axis of extensive Roman remains is a native fort, while at the opposite end are burial monuments, assumed to be broadly contemporary: the Roman remains may have created an arena for the conscious exhibition of status and authority at an established local power centre.

Internal buildings

Within these sites we would expect to find buildings fulfilling a wide range of purposes, and especially buildings associated with royal and noble functions, notably feasting. Adomnán suggests that in Columba's day Bridei's *munitio* ('fortress') would have included a king's hall (*aula regia*) and house (*domus*). We might also expect to find storerooms and perhaps a treasury, in addition to the full range of domestic and industrial buildings. Unfortunately physical evidence for buildings within forts is elusive, in part due to the lack of investigation of interiors as opposed to defences, but also due to the slight nature of the surviving remains. The only significant exception to date is a rectilinear building with curved ends within Green Castle, at Portknockie in Moray, a coastal promontory cut off by a substantial timber-laced rampart. Many types of timber building (which we know from both archaeological and documentary sources to have been constructed), particularly those built up from a wooden beam laid directly on the ground, would not necessarily have left much evidence for their existence. Adomnán describes the collecting from considerable distances of rods for wattling, and dressed oak and pine, for monastic buildings on Iona. At Dundurn there was a wattle floor and also limited evidence for wattle and daub.

Crannogs

Not all power centres were fortified and others exploited natural features to afford some protection. Crannogs or 'built-up' islets are found throughout Scotland where there is suitable water and date from the Neolithic to the 17th-century (hence their diverse regional and chronological form). Without excavation it is impossible to either date or identify the status of any particular site but some may have been early historic high-status sites, for which the strongest candidates are in southern Scotland (Buiston, Borean Loch, and Milton Loch), Ireland and, in one instance, Wales. Only Breetaness in Rousay, Orkney,



32 Reconstruction of Buiston crannog by Alan Braby.

has been identified as having possible Pictish levels and only Loch Glashan, 8 km (5 mi) from Dunadd, has produced contemporary evidence in Argyll. This dates from the 7th to 8th centuries, and the presence of metalworking, imported pottery and an ornate penannular brooch indicate that its inhabitants were of high status, possibly royal. Buiston, while high status, was clearly still also a busy farmstead (32). Since the site is still waterlogged, organic remains, such as timber structures, can still survive in a good state of preservation, unlike at most other sites. The short-lived nature of the buildings at Buiston – dated to the late 6th century through dendrochronology of the preserved wood – has implications for how we interpret the longevity of other sites. The organic remains from these sites open our eyes to the range of early historic activities and practices and hence provide a vital addition to what we have been able to learn so far from ‘dry’ sites.

Unenclosed sites

Although enigmatic, Forteviot (*Fothiurtaicht*) in Strathearn probably provides us with the best indications of what an early historic palace (*palacium*) consisted. In terms of its components, it could well have been on a par with a contemporary Carolingian palace. Although not the only palace referred to, it is the only one whose location has been identified with any certainty. Tradition and other sources refer to its existence as a royal site for the late Pictish kings (the last of whom was slain there) and during the early years of the amalgamated kingdom. Later medieval sources imply that it was still considered a royal site in the 12th century. The inferred existence of a late 9th-century royal chapel (33) and the presence of an extensive crop-mark complex noted since 1975 add weight to the suggestion that the palace was near here (34). Free-standing crosses from the 9th century at Dupplin and Invermay stood on opposing hillsides overlooking the valley-bottom site. The actual palace site has not been identified and, like the chapel, it may have been swept into the river. No traces of an enclosure survive in the vicinity and, by analogy with the Bernician royal sites of Yeavering and Milfield, or the presumed Anglian settlement at Sprouston (Scottish Borders), it is assumed that this complex would not have been heavily fortified. However, a

33 Forteviot arch, recovered from the Water of May beneath ‘Haly Hill’ and presumed to have been part of an ornate chapel (NMS).



palisaded enclosure, if it existed, could have constituted a significant physical barrier.

The Pictish royal centre at Scone was deliberately cultivated to become a holy royal centre and inauguration site and may have been a similar type of site to Forteviot. But with the exception of Moot Hill (the ‘Hill of Faith’) no upstanding remains have survived the construction of the later medieval Augustinian abbey.

The Brough of Birsay might also be described as an unfortified site, although it is on a tidal island (there is debate as to whether it was part of the mainland in the early historic period). This appears

to have been the most important early historic site in the Orkney Islands, an assumption largely based on its finds, location and subsequent importance in the Norse period. The site produced a large number of Pictish pins and combs associated with debris for the manufacture of fine metalwork in the late 8th century. In addition there is a fine slab decorated with figures of Pictish warriors and symbols (see 19). Pictish structures from the 7th or 8th century have been identified in excavations, but there is insufficient evidence to suggest what the overall layout of the site might have been.



Association with prehistoric ritual landscapes

One important feature that Forteviot shares in common with many other early historic royal sites throughout northern Britain and Ireland is its association with a major prehistoric ritual complex, as revealed by aerial photography. It is likely that many of these features, notably the late Neolithic henges, were still upstanding. The apparent siting of burials around the edge of an enormous palisaded enclosure also suggests that earthworks associated with the enclosure were still visible. There can be no question of direct continuity of function, but the social élites may have deliberately used or associated themselves with these monuments of the past in order to both promote and legitimize their own interests. At a more prosaic level, the henges might even have formed arenas for public assemblies and courts, which were usually held in the open (only Yeavering in Northumberland is known to have had a specially designed open-air theatre). The assembly site at Scone is another example of such associations. Dunadd, sited at one end of the Kilmartin valley in an area best known for its ritual and ceremonial importance in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, is another, with the early Christian focus at Kilmartin at the opposite end of the valley. Landscapes and the monuments within them carried meaning for the people who occupied and (re-)created them. Systematic archaeological study of the phenomenon in which prehistoric monuments are apparently adopted in Scotland as the backdrop for formal assemblies in the 8th and 9th centuries is required (Driscoll 1998c).

Hierarchy of power centres

Given that the upper echelons of both Pictish and Dál Riata society consisted of different levels of kings and nobles, we might anticipate that a distinction would be apparent between their sites, although any such distinction is scarcely marked in the documentary sources. The concept of a chief place appears to have existed, since Adomnán refers to the *caput regionis* (‘chief place of the region’) where Columba met sailors from Gaul, possibly

34 Aerial photograph of crop marks at Forteviot, including early historic burials (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

either Dunollie or, more likely, Dunadd. But these cannot be understood as capitals in the modern sense, as places where people also lived who were not directly concerned with government or the royal court and whose main occupation was not agriculture. On the basis of Northumbrian documentary sources there appears to be a threefold hierarchy of royal sites: *civitas*, the principal place in a kingdom; *castellum* or *urbs*, a lesser fortified site (Dunbar in East Lothian falls into this category); *villa regis*, an undefended palace, residence, township or estate centre. At each of these we might expect to find an assembly place used by the largely itinerant court – perhaps places where temporary structures might be erected. Alas, there is no easy equation between the suggested social hierarchy, the site hierarchy suggested on the basis of documentary sources, and the archaeological field remains, since when excavated these sites often produce the same range of high-status objects. Nor can sites, with notable exceptions, be matched to the historically attested territories that are believed to have existed.

The changing nature of power centres

The development of power centres parallels the non-static nature of society, which underwent profound changes during this period. The strategic siting of many of the early historic fortifications, such as Dunnottar at the point where the Grampian mountains most closely approach the sea, and their 5th/6th-century origins, reflect the increasing dominance of new élites whose authority was acquiring territorial definition. As their power increased during the 7th or 8th century they were able to command more resources – both in terms of people and of materials – a substantial amount of which was invested in the creation of larger and more complex power bases in which a wide range of specialized activities was under their immediate control. But the authority of the new leaders was constantly contested, as documentary sources intimate, and the kings had to go to enormous efforts to make their physical presence felt throughout the land. By the 9th century many of the earlier power centres became redundant (there is certainly no evidence of significant activity at any after about the 11th century). Power bases moved down from the fortified hilltops to the valley bottoms. Driscoll (1998b) attributes this to a decrease in the importance of naked military symbolism, as exemplified by the construction, appearance and function of such sites, and the replacement of indigenous architectural forms with formally set-out rectilinear ones that are drawn, ultimately, from Continental traditions. This transition must also reflect a growing security and political stability, perhaps fostered by the Church, with which these later settlements may have had a closer association. Additionally, lords may have required more immediate access to pasture for their horses and the produce from their well-managed estates, rather than being so reliant on dues paid to them while on peripatetic tour.

We are now at the point where we know what a power centre might look like. But how did it function, what activities were taking place there and what was its relationship to the countryside and its inhabitants? Power stemmed ultimately from the agricultural products of the land, and it is to this that we must now turn.

Agriculture, industry and trade: the currency of authority

Power came from the land; early historic lords derived authority through their ability to exploit its agricultural potential and control its inhabitants, most of whom would have been involved in producing food. So, by examining the available evidence from the 'bottom-up', we can begin to piece together a picture of the wider landscape in which society operated and to understand better the role that the power centres played in controlling it. This is difficult since documentary sources rarely describe or refer to the activities of ordinary people. However, fieldwork, mainly as a result of rescue archaeology, is beginning to inhabit the early historic landscape with activity while at the same time palaeoenvironmental studies are clothing it in vegetation.

Rearing of animals

Since Neolithic times, people have been farming Scotland from semi-permanent or permanent settlements, developing and refining a mixed economy based on the exploitation of arable, pasture, and coastal resource, where relevant. Annual cycles of production and consumption dominated most of their activities, and we can reasonably assume long-distance contact (perhaps formal assemblies) for breeding and exchange of animals at certain times of year. We can recognize from their sculpture that animals had special meanings for the Picts, and their depiction of them has a particular awareness and sensitivity. In early historic Ireland the whole economy revolved around cattle. They were both a measure of status and the main source of wealth; lords gave their clients cattle and land in return for food renders, service and surplus beasts. (We can contrast this with the importance of pigs and sheep to the Anglo-Saxon economy.) So the number of client relationships a lord could maintain depended ultimately on how many cattle he could provide. Analysis of Irish sources and bone assemblages demonstrates that a developed economy existed for the production of dairy products rather than beef (this can be recognized on the basis of the patterns of age at death and sex of cattle).

Evidence for Scottish early historic exploitation of animals is still very partial and generally biased towards the Northern and Western Isles where excellent bone preservation is the norm. Extracting meaning from any assemblages is fraught with difficulties, being dependent not only on what part and portion of a site is excavated, but also how and where the animals were killed, butchered, cooked and disposed of, and what has happened to the deposits since. The picture that emerges is one, as we might expect, of regional variation. With notable exceptions, cattle bones tend to predominate in Scottish assemblages. There is debate as to how these bones can be used to identify dairying practices, but on balance it seems that dairying was an important component of the diverse, mixed agricultural strategy that most communities would have practised



35 Reconstruction of Buckquoy with the Brough of Birsay in the background, by Dave Pollock.

36 This sculpture from Kirriemuir appears to depict an upright loom to the right of the enthroned woman.

farmstead in Orkney (35), about one-third of all animals were killed during their first year for meat and hide, but the majority were kept for milk and perhaps draught. At the adjacent high-status settlement on the Brough of Birsay, cattle bones predominated but the animals are unlikely to have been permanently reared on the island because there is insufficient pasture; the meat could have been transported over in semi-butchered form, perhaps from a nearby home farm (Buckquoy is an obvious contender) or as part of food renders from clients. Animal hides and fleeces were of course used to make shoes, bags and other personal and household items. From the monastery at Portmahomack comes evidence for vellum manufacture, a highly specialized process that must have involved the slaughter of large numbers of calves, an activity that we might presume to be widespread at other major church establishments.

Sheep or goats (they are difficult to distinguish archaeologically) and pigs tend to make up the remainder of most bone assemblages; at Scalloway (Shetland) pigs became the most important species at this time and this may be significant given that pork was regarded as a delicacy by other early medieval peoples. Unlike in Ireland, little evidence has been detected that sheep were kept for their wool rather than meat. Evidence in the form of surviving tools and products for woollen cloth production is also slight, despite the fact that it must have been a crucial and widespread activity, traditionally the pursuit of women. Evidence for spinning survives in the form of stone spindle-whorls but the reason for the general absence of surviving weaving tools and looms is that they would have been made of iron and wood. Exceptions include a triple female burial at Hawkhill in Angus of late-1st-millennium, possibly Pictish, date that contains an iron weaving sword and comb, the depiction of an upright warp-weighted loom on a Pictish cross-slab (36), and possible loom fragments from Buiston. Fabrics are certainly the poor partners in deliberations about Insular art because they rarely survive, although a linen

(Bond 2002). In his *Life of Columba*, Adomnán describes the monks of Iona as being involved in both pastoral and arable farming. At Buiston a cattle hobble and wooden dairying implements vividly complement the bone evidence here for dairying. Adomnán's *Life* emphasizes the value attached to cattle, with its descriptions of Columba's ability to increase people's fortunes by causing their cattle to multiply, and of the troubles that will befall those who damage them. At Buckquoy, a small Pictish



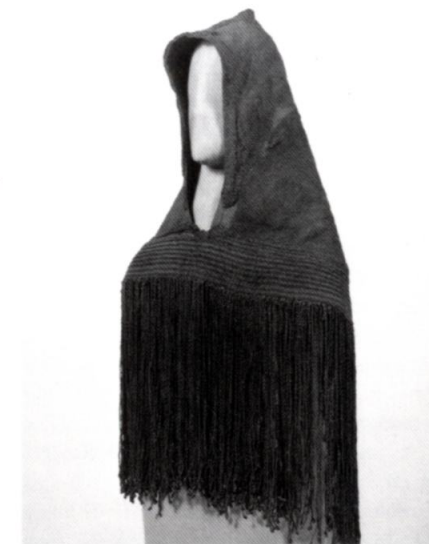
garment beautifully embroidered with imported silk threads from a royal crannog at Llangorse in Wales opens our eyes to the possibilities. Wool was no doubt the main material from which clothes were fabricated (37), but we cannot rule out the possibility also of linen manufacture. Any textiles produced on farms may have been brought to the power centres to be exchanged for high-status goods and/or as dues.

Horses were sometimes eaten at the end of their working lives (as at Iona where their hides were also used in leatherworking), but their prime function was in transport, traction and warfare. The prevalence of Iron Age harness pieces in Scotland, and the tribal name *Epidii* ('horse-gods') from Kintyre, emphasize their importance to the native population for whom they were undoubtedly a symbol of wealth and status, not least in the deer-hunt; witness also their frequent portrayal on Pictish sculpture where their accurate depiction suggests careful selection for breeding (38).

The cat and domestic fowl should also get a brief mention, since the first evidence of these in Scotland appears in the Iron Age and early historic period.

Exploitation of wild resources

A Welsh cradle song of possible 7th-century date provides us with a vivid impression of how anything that did not fly and had a value for food, hide and fur might be caught by a hunter with 'spear on his shoulder, club in his hand', accompanied by his dogs or hunting from his coracle. There is no evidence of a subsistence economy. To the contrary,



37 Child's woollen hood, found in a bog in St Andrew's Parish, Orkney in 1867 and C-14 dated to between 250 and 615. It is made of undyed fabric woven on an upright loom, fringed with tablet-woven bands and long tassels, some of which appear to be recycled from other garments (NMS).



38 Kirriemuir horsemen. Note also the well-detailed clothing.

individual populations deployed considerable efforts and skills in the conscious selection and exploitation of specific marine and terrestrial resources. In the Western Isles deer appear to have been a staple part of the diet; elsewhere, with the exception of Edinburgh Castle, there is little evidence for their significant consumption, perhaps because deer hunting was an élite sport, as inferred from the documentary and Pictish sculptural evidence. A wooden deer trap from Auquharney Moss in Aberdeenshire is C-14 dated to the 6th century.

Coastal resources were immensely important. Fishing could extend into deep-sea waters (probably using limpets for bait). Saithe and cod were highly important to the inhabitants of the Northern and Western Isles (we can contrast this with the later Norse preference for herring in the west, though cod continued in importance in the north). In comparison to Orkney and Shetland, the people in the Western Isles made greater use of marine food resources (again until the Norse period, when there was an increase in the intensity of fishing, and in the relative importance of boat fishing in particular). As well as fowling (including gannets and puffins), bird eggs were eaten. Seal meat was also consumed: the monks of Iona had special rights to hunting grounds off Mull.

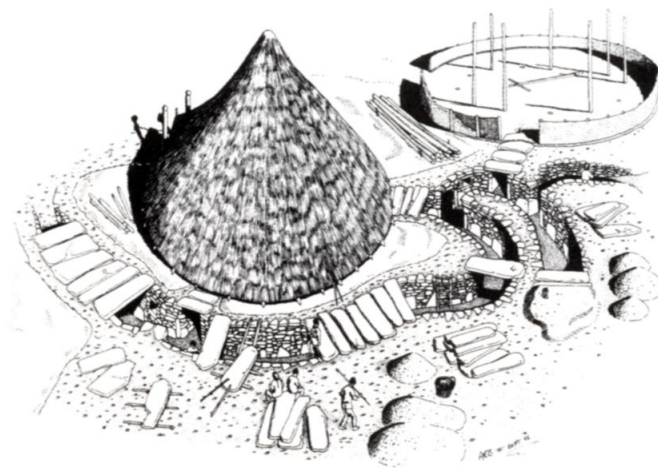
Fungi, wild fruit, nuts, berries and leafy plants were also seasonally available, including hazelnuts, raspberries, blackberries, crab-apples, sloes, damsons, elderberries, wild cherries, crowberries, sorrel and docks. A wide range of wild plants such as scurvy-grass may also have been used as dietary supplements. Potential flavourings included coriander and dill (recognized at Buiston crannog) and bog-myrtle (which could be used in ale). At Dundurn the lower levels of the citadel were waterlogged and from among the preserved organic material was recovered human faeces containing some 24 cherry stones. This midden also contained a mass of bracken, moss and woodchippings, which had probably been cleared from a building where they acted as flooring or bedding. Bee-keeping is known to have been practised in Iron Age England and merited its own law code in 7th-century Ireland. Honey would have been highly prized as a natural sweetener and as the basis for mead, an alcoholic drink much referred to in the *Gododdin*. Beeswax also had many uses.

Cultivation

Arable land would have relied on the dung of animals and/or seaweed and/or certain types of household rubbish for its continuing fertility. There is evidence from Old Scatness for the careful separation of different types of midden material and a clear indication that curation of soil was an important activity that the inhabitants had millennia of experience of handling. Surviving plant remains from early historic sites are still few: different types of barley and oats are most common; wheat and rye are also known. The evidence from the Northern Isles in general suggests a period of agricultural intensification with oats – a valuable winter fodder that can also tolerate being grown in poorer conditions – perhaps being introduced at this time (Bond 2002). Flax seeds, recognized in contexts dating from as early as about 5,000 years ago, may have been used for food, oil (its seeds produce linseed oil) or fibres (its stem fibres are used to make linen); whatever the use there is a growing body of evidence for flax's importance in the early historic – and certainly Norse – periods. Little is known of the details of crop processing, although at Buiston the bulk crop processing is seen to take place off-site. Adomnán probably refers to a corn-drying kiln at

Iona but the only physical evidence in Scotland for such early historic structures is at the Anglian monastery of Hoddam (Dumfries and Galloway); elsewhere roasting in fire pits was probably the norm. We know from the occurrence of charred grains on sites that accidents could be frequent. Rotary querns are a common find on most sites and suggest the grinding of grain for domestic consumption. In Ireland horizontal water mills for larger-scale processing became increasingly common in this period and tidal mills have also been recognized at the monastery of Nendrum in County Down. The first evidence for horizontal mills in Scotland is now recognized at Bankhead Farm, Dumfries and Galloway, from where a mill-wheel paddle is C-14 dated to between 640 and 880 (Sheridan 2002). A probable mill pool and leet have been found during excavations at the Pictish monastery at Portmahomack, and a likely site has also been identified on Iona. The possibility that such technological innovations were introduced to Scotland by the church needs future study. It is reasonable to assume that early forms of brassicas – kale, cabbage, turnip and a type of spinach – as well as legumes such as peas and beans, were also being cultivated.

Although place names in **carden* or *pres* ('thicket' or 'covert') imply that parts of Pictland may have been wooded, and were notable for this fact, the distribution of souterrains also suggests that large tracts of the country were being cultivated from the late 1st millennium BC, if not before. Souterrains are semi-subterranean chambers found throughout Scotland, but particularly in Angus, Perthshire, Aberdeenshire, around the Moray Firth, Caithness, Sutherland and the Northern and Western Isles. Most lie in areas of first-class agricultural land (although this may also be due to the potential of these soils to produce the crop marks that lead to their recognition). Not only do they come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but their widespread dating also implies different functions. The northern examples are earlier Iron Age in date, while the distinctive Angus and Perthshire examples apparently date to the centuries either side of the beginning of the Christian era. The latter group is best understood since they have more often been excavated, and aerial reconnaissance by the RCAHMS has led to a substantial increase in their numbers. Here the souterrains generally comprise a curving passage cut into the ground and lined with either stone or timber and wattle, roofed with either stone or timber lintels and probably turf above this. There is usually a main entrance at one end, with subsidiary small entrances and/or chambers, although material may possibly have been taken in through the temporary dismantlement of a roof. Much smaller ditched features are now also being identified as souterrains and may be later in date than their more imposing relatives. With their year-round even temperature they can be understood as places for storage of crops and perhaps dairy produce, although direct evidence for this is still lacking – we need to find an untouched souterrain that burnt *in situ* to pursue this. Their existence seems to indicate that the early Picts were well capable of producing, storing and presumably redistributing large quantities of cereal on an individual household and community level. The suggestion that they were underground byres ought to be dismissed on grounds of impracticability. Because of their ubiquity they cannot be taken as indicators of high status, although the ability to store large amounts of food and seed would have increased the power and stability of the associated community. A small but significant collection of artefacts from Shanzie in Angus reminds us that the inhabitants of such sites need not be humble peasant farmers. Ritual functions may possibly also be attributed to them: we should note the presence



39 Reconstruction of roundhouses and souterrain by Alan Braby.

of small niches and the incorporation of prehistoric rock art, in particular.

It used to be thought that souterrains existed in isolation but it is now recognized from the evidence of crop marks and excavation that they are usually associated with either timber roundhouses and/or stone buildings, from which they are often entered (39). These settlements seem to continue after the souterrains fell out of use. Following Lesley Macinnes, Ian Armit (1999) has argued for deliberate infilling of souterrains in the late 2nd or 3rd century in direct relation to Roman activities on their northern frontier. However, not all souterrains are deliberately infilled and some fall out of use before this date (Coleman and Hunter 2002).

Excavations at Easter Kinnear and Hawkhill, both in Fife (40), have demonstrated that some cropmarks appearing as annular, crescentic or round features are 6th/7th-century sub-circular and sub-rectangular semi-subterranean buildings forming part of hamlets that also include rectilinear structures. It is still unclear how these subterranean buildings worked because evidence for timber construction is lacking, but could these represent cellars under wooden floors? Either way, we have no reason to suggest that alternative forms of storage to souterrains were not found – not least above-ground features that would leave little archaeological trace – but we cannot yet explain why this change took place.

If we are correct in assuming that these nucleated settlements are indicative of the extent of agricultural exploitation in Pictland south of the Mounth then we can understand why this part of Pictland had the potential for the development of political complexity, given its capacity for the accumulation and redistribution of agricultural wealth.



40 Hawkhill, Fife: scooped houses, part of an unenclosed settlement of the mid-1st millennium AD, at the end of excavation. The feature on the right represents a sequence in which roundhouses were finally replaced by a timber rectangular building (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

Fields, trackways and wider countryside

We should expect the countryside to have been a busy, well-managed landscape with fields, droveways and tracks interspersed with grazing and woodland, some of which was being managed as part of a long-term strategy to produce wattle, charcoal and bark for tannin (used in

tanning leather). Unpublished peat-core studies by Richard Tipping and his colleagues at Stirling University are showing the potential for understanding by decade (if not finer resolution) what trees and other vegetation were growing in the vicinity of the core. This means there is the potential where peat cores can be obtained to identify, and attempt to explain, subtle changes in woodland management through time.

Otherwise, recognition of the physical appearance of the wider landscape is difficult. At Lairg, Sutherland, in an area that is likely to have only been used for rough grazing over the last 1,000 years, rig-and-furrow, field banks and clearance cairns have been found sealed under a peat layer dating to the 1st millennium AD. These may be early historic fields, which are otherwise difficult to recognize. Similar evidence has been found sealed beneath peat at Machrie Moor and Kilpatrick, both on Arran, and beneath sand at Freswick Links, Highland. Where agricultural conditions were favourable, as around Old Scatness, it is conceivable that the first divisions into an infield for arable cultivation immediately around settlements, and an outfield for sporadic cultivation, date from this period. Beyond these cultivated areas was the rougher ground used for hill pasture and other resources. Place names also hint at a Pictish practice of transhumance taken over by the incoming Gaels (Barrow 1998). In other words, we hardly need doubt that all areas of the countryside were exploited in some form of other, and that the resources from one area, whether natural (peat for fuel and building, or heather, bracken and moss, for instance) or pro-actively managed (such as woodland) were thoroughly exploited. Where infield land was particularly valued, as in the north, it seems that settlement was less likely to move around.

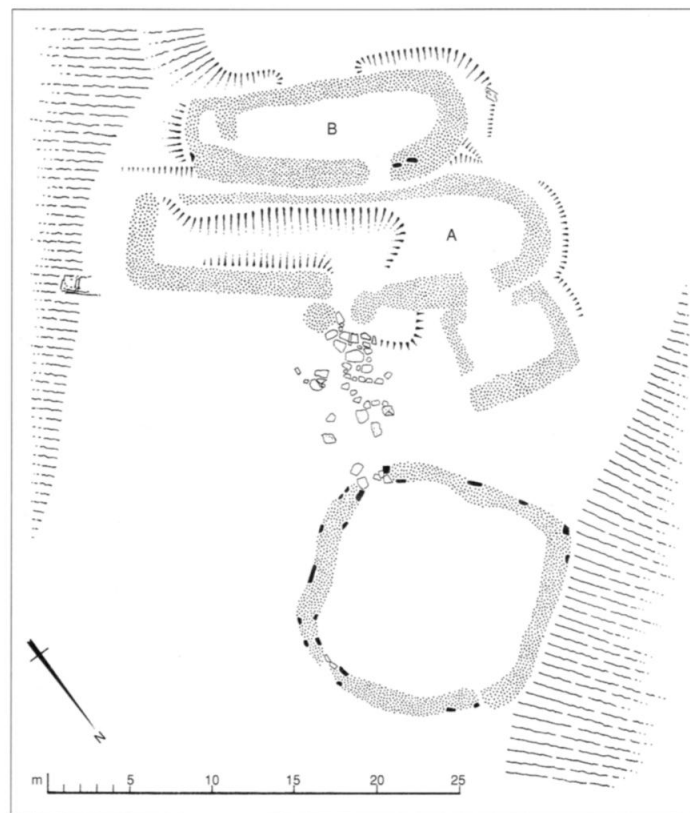
As to human mobility around such large landscapes, no direct evidence for early historic wheeled transport has yet been found, although we know that the technology had been in use for centuries beforehand (for instance, the cart from an Iron Age burial at Newbridge, on the outskirts of Edinburgh). Otherwise reliance must have been on foot-power, horse and boat.

Other settlement and building types

Even though most people shared the common pursuits of farming and relied almost exclusively on local produce and goods, their farmsteads vary enormously in form and content, although some regional trends are discernable. Excavations increasingly produce evidence for an early historic presence of some sort in the landscape, but the excavation of structures rarely fails to



41 Knowe of Skea, Orkney: excavations in 2002 and 2003 have revealed a series of cellular buildings surrounding this structure (perhaps a reused Neolithic structure). Preliminary interpretation suggests the site may have had a mortuary function in the 1st millennium AD (EASE Archaeological Consultants/Orkney Archaeological Trust).



42 Pitcarmick: one of the distinctive early historic buildings first noted here (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

which the term 'Pitcarmick-type buildings' has been coined (after the type site; 42). They consist of long houses with a 'residential' area and a larger area with a central soakaway. The preliminary results of excavations suggest that they belong to the mid-late 1st millennium and aerial photography has extended their distribution to the Cairngorms area. Evidence for ferrous metalworking is commonly found in the vicinity of early historic settlements, and in Orkney (Mine Howe), Shetland (Burland, Trondra) and Highland (Portmahomack), buildings that were largely dedicated to iron and/or fine metalworking have been found.

North of the Mounth there is crop-mark evidence for souterrains and settlement similar to that in the south. Large rectilinear enclosures of some apparent architectural complexity, as at Tarradale, Highland, may belong to the early to middle centuries of the 1st millennium AD. To the south some of the presumed timber sub-rectangular houses found on the east coast may be early historic in date by analogy with supposed Anglian examples found as far north as Fife (43), and a substantial 9th-12th century rectilinear building with a rounded end has been excavated at Callendar Park, Falkirk.

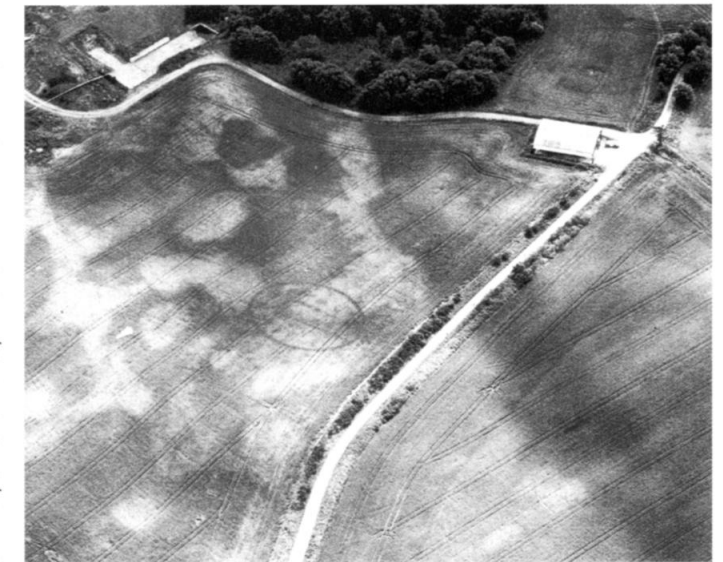
surprise with new forms of architecture (41). We are still a long way from the level of understanding and 'fine-grained analysis of landscape setting and historical background' that we need (Driscoll 1997).

While we might expect widespread building in timber too, and infer a sophisticated carpentry tradition, direct evidence for this is sparse. Shifting settlements of unenclosed stone-and-timber, oval or roundhouses (often with a subterranean component) appear to have been the norm on the lower, more fertile ground of southern Pictland. However, there is some evidence of enclosed sites (such as the sub-circular palisaded site at Upper Gothens in Perth and Kinross). A Scottish-wide trend towards building rectilinear structures can be detected in general, but particularly in what might be termed more elite sites. On higher ground at Carn Dubh above Pitlochry in Perth and Kinross, in an area long used for rough grazing, prehistoric roundhouses were replaced by sub-rectangular structures, possibly from the mid-1st millennium. In the 1980s, survey work in Perthshire led to the discovery of a previously unrecognized series of buildings for

In chapter 3 we saw how some high-status duns appear to have been built in the mid-1st millennium AD, if not later. The dating of Argyll duns as a whole poses interesting questions. Broadly speaking they can be defined as thick, stone-walled enclosures, usually sub-circular in plan. At least two-thirds of the number of duns are likely to have been roofed over and they can be interpreted as defensive farmsteads. They need to be understood in the wider context of related architecture that is found in the Pictish periphery of the Western and Northern Isles and the northernmost part of mainland Scotland. Here duns and brochs comprise a common tradition of monumental Atlantic stone-built houses, some of which have architectural details such as intramural cells or galleries, or upper galleries. It is now considered that these were generally built between around 700 BC and the beginning of the Christian era. That many of these duns were built in the centuries on either side of AD 700 cannot be demonstrated, and on balance may be unlikely, although outworks discovered around many of the Argyll duns might conceivably relate to that period.

Further east a group of circular stone-walled enclosures found mainly in Strathmummel and Strathtay, in Perth and Kinross, is poorly understood. Litigan is the only example to have produced a C-14 date, between the late 8th and early 13th century. While comparisons have been drawn with 6th-11th century Irish ring-forts, a closer and far nearer analogy exists in the Iron Age dun at Aldclune.

From excavations since the 1970s it is now recognized that settlement on the Atlantic roundhouse sites might have extended over centuries. Previously, although certain distinctive artefacts attested to early historic activity, associated structures had simply not been recognized because, in comparison to the preceding monumental Iron Age buildings, they were insubstantial. Cellular complexes of conjoined roundhouses and attached cells are now known to have been built within or beside their monumental predecessors, surrounded by or dug into middens and dunes, often utilizing earlier features and undergoing several phases of construction. For instance, a wheelhouse at Cnip, on Lewis in the Western Isles (a type of structure that flourished in the 2nd to 3rd centuries and is sometimes found built inside brochs) was gradually transformed to a cellular complex, finally to be replaced by a linear house. At Bornais, on South Uist in the Western Isles, evidence for a burnt timber roof and an unusual hearth with a bone setting of approximately 4th-century date comes from a reworked wheelhouse (Mulville *et al.* 2003).



43 Timber hall and enclosure at Monboddio, as revealed from crop marks. (Ian Shepherd, Aberdeenshire Council)



44 The well-preserved remains of a wheelhouse excavated at Old Scatness. (Stephen Dockrill)

At Atlantic roundhouse sites has also been found away from them. Their slight nature renders them difficult to detect, unless recognized, for example, during the course of coastal erosion. At Buckquoy, Orkney (see 35), a single building with a so-called 'figure-of-eight' or linear arrangement of sub-circular cells was found, and this type of plan appears to have had a wide currency. A complex of buildings with similar plans, perhaps a village, has been found on the Udal peninsula of North Uist and more recently at Bostadh, Great Bernera, where they are semi-subterranean. At Deer Park Farm in Northern Ireland the construction of a timber equivalent has been precisely dated by dendrochronology to after 648.

At Pool on the Orkadian island of Sanday an extensive network of interconnecting buildings set into a Neolithic midden was excavated in the 1980s. The first structures were a souterrain-type feature and a building with bins along two sides, apparently for feeding animals. In the 5th century a stone roundhouse was built and subsequently remodelled. It had a partial ring of low upright stones, which encircled an inner area containing a hearth; the outer ring was divided into a series of radial divisions, some of which contained tanks for storage. The presence of post-holes, sockets and pads attests to the use of timber, which must then have been a more widely available commodity in Orkney than it is now. In the 6th century a second chamber was added, and subsequently a rectangular courtyard was created and eventually used for the dumping of midden material. A large area of paving gave access to the buildings around it. This deliberate expansion must have involved considerable social organization, but the settlement ultimately contracted in size, to be taken over by the Vikings in the 8th century.

Why the transition from monumental Atlantic roundhouses to less substantial cellular structures? Analysis of settlement architecture can provide important insights into the development of society because buildings are the places where much human action and interaction is likely to take place. Without going into too much detail (see *Celtic Scotland* in this series for more), it can be suggested that Atlantic roundhouses developed from

Similar architectural forms are found overlying some Orcadian and Shetland brochs and the highly sophisticated nucleated villages that had developed around them (at Gurness, Howe and Scalloway, for example; 44). In some instances these settlements may have been deliberately sited to exploit the former status of brochs (see 12).

Rectilinear buildings found on some sites, such as the 5th/6th-century levels at the Howe, may relate to a series of poorly understood structures in Caithness and Sutherland known as 'wags' (from the Gaelic *uamh* for 'cave') – linear buildings with rounded ends divided internally by pairs of opposing upright stones into stalls.

The new range of building types found

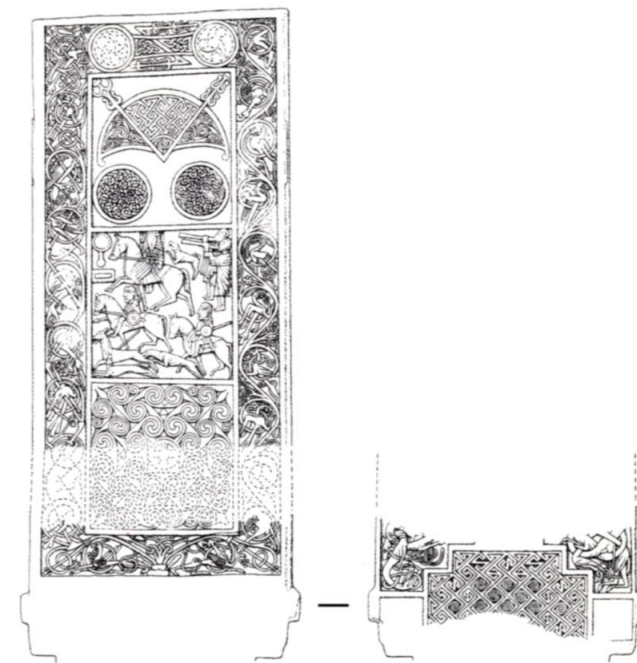
native settlement prototypes as a means of expressing authority and closely controlling the activities of inhabitants. The more impressive the appearance of a settlement the higher its perceived status. The widespread nature of these settlements suggests that power largely resided at the local, extended-family-group level. But architecture is only one means by which power can be expressed and, as relations of clientship gradually began to supersede kinship, society became more centralized. Authority was relocated from the immediate settlement to what were for most of the farming population more remote power centres. In the case of the Pictish periphery, its inhabitants were becoming part of a wider confederacy of peoples, whose ultimate leader was based in the Pictish heartlands of mainland Scotland. Since ultimate authority no longer existed within the immediate family group, alternative expressions of power other than architecture (which had most impact on its residents) came into play. As we shall see below, the control of resources, particularly prestige goods, became very important. Personal appearance and the capacity to display wealth to people whom one did not see on a day-to-day basis became a much more important and effective means of demonstrating authority. This was a portable, symbolic code, which could be understood over far-flung areas.

Finally we must mention large mounds in the Orcadian northern isles that have until recently been compared to medieval farm-mounds in Norway, where they are thought to have built up from the decay of turf-built structures. The evidence so far from Sanday and Papa Westray suggests the Scottish examples accumulated from 500 to 1400, sometimes over earlier Neolithic settlement mounds, due to the build-up around a settlement of organic waste (such as peat ash) that was not being distributed to the fields as fertilizer. A special explanation is required for why this particular practice was not adopted elsewhere (Bertelsen and Lamb 1993; Lowe 1998).

Farms and estates

Study of early medieval (and later) kingship in the British Isles has demonstrated how kings and their courts had to keep on the move to survive, since it made more sense for them to go to the food, rather than vice versa. They did this by visiting their own land (on a seasonal basis) and obtaining food renders from its inhabitants, or by taking hospitality from a magnate or monastery. Hence the food requirements of the expensive court were successfully divided across the kingdom. Such journeys were important not only because they sustained the court but because relations of control and clientship were physically reinforced by the royal presence. There was the opportunity for royalty to meet their subjects, to bestow on them prestige goods, to dispense justice and to collect

45 Pictish cross-slab from Hilton of Cadboll with a hunting scene on its back face (see enlargement on p. 5). The slab survives in two main pieces, here reconstructed by Ian G Scott. The cross-face of the upper portion was defaced in 1676. See picture 83 (p. 90) for the front of the lower portion at the time of discovery in 2001.



tribute. Hunting deer on horseback, an activity especially associated with the élite, was probably also an integral part of these tours (45); highly structured activities such as division of spoils and communal feasting after such a hunt reflected the status of the participants. In this way relations of dependency would have been reinforced. Obviously there was a physical limit to how far away and how frequently a king or queen might visit their whole kingdom. Tax in kind from the periphery of kingdoms is therefore likely to have been livestock sent on the hoof or non-perishable goods, such as candles, fleece and hides. A network of loyal royal officials, including bishops, each probably with his own circuit, was therefore essential if royalty was to retain some form of authority, however nominal, over larger territories. What then is the evidence for estates and the collection of agricultural resources among the Dál Riata and Picts?

The value of the *Miniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* as a civil survey and record of tribute from taxable households of the Dál Riata is now disregarded, and there have certainly been problems equating what it purports to record with what can be seen in archaeological terms on the ground. By contrast, in Northumbria, studies are showing how early medieval territorial and social structures ('shires') lie at the root of the later feudal structures of tenure, taxation and territory; Driscoll (2002) is making the same case for parts of Pictland. Driscoll is the archaeologist to be credited with recognizing the importance of thanages as the widespread centres where relationships of power would have been negotiated. He has shown how the three likely main components of the thanage have their origin in an earlier Pictish 'shire': a principle residence or *caput*; portions (*pett* – see p. 30) of agricultural land, perhaps with an enclosed main farm and dispersed settlement; and a ceremonial centre for public events associated with law and royal power. Forms of administration based on the principle of the 'multiple-estate' (composed of several units) are found throughout post-Roman Britain under many names. This was a flexible system allowing for the principal authority to be a king or other secular or ecclesiastical lord, with a style and form of main residence to match. As ever, we must probably anticipate enormous variability, for instance as to whether the resident of the *caput* controlled services and collected dues in their own right or on behalf of a king. Dendrochronology is producing evidence for a significant phase of tree-regeneration in the early- to mid-10th century along waterways and the east coast, which has implications for land organization and estate management (Crone and Mills 2002).

The earliest origins and date of the Pictish 'shire' system are difficult to disentangle and this obviously has a bearing on how widely such a form of land organization might have extended. Driscoll highlights a series of shifts in 8th/9th-century society that are clearly significant. The pattern is clearest in those areas that are known to have royal associations. First, there is the shift from lordly centres on hilltops to unfortified palaces (p. 48). Shared facilities, such as water mills, may have been sited near such principal residences. There is also a tendency at this time to create a new type of ceremonial site, the open meeting place, where the theatre of power might be orchestrated (p. 47). At the same time as creating these public meeting places, local lords were increasingly investing their resources in the patronage of monumental Christian sculpture (p. 92) and, we must assume, the small churches with which these were associated. It cannot be proved whether the changes observable in the 8th/9th century should be attributed to a co-ordinated

campaign under the instruction of a royalty that was exerting new forms of authority, but this is tempting. Nor are new land units necessarily being defined, but something new about authority is certainly being expressed at the local level. We might assume some Pictish 'shires' were the means by which assessments for military service, and the equivalents of *cain* (a regular tribute on all territories acknowledging a king's superiority) and *conveth* (an obligation of hospitality – food or accommodation) could be made. Together these would have formed the main sources of revenue for the crown.

Using a combination of archaeological and historical evidence, Driscoll (1991) has suggested the extent of some thanages and the key components within each. Such a bottom-up approach demonstrates that power flowed into the hands of the royal and religious authorities by means of a thoroughly structured and organized landscape of agricultural exploitation.

It is clear that even if the boundaries and internal structure of the 'shires' did not change (which is unlikely), the people in charge of them did. The extension of royal authority to new areas must also mean that authorities acquired, through either passive or aggressive means, the right to make grants of land outside their own territories. The transfer of land, whether to the Church or individuals, must have brought with it major changes in the fabric of society. Gifts of land or transfer of the responsibility for their maintenance went in one direction only, resulting in a permanent obligation to the giver that could never be discharged. The officials who acquired this delegated responsibility in return for their loyalty would have striven to uphold the system from which their source of wealth derived, and which it was in their interest to maintain. Conversely, there was always the danger that if they were given too much power they might abuse it and turn against the hand that fed them: endowment of land and/or its associated privileges was a risky but necessary move.

Specialized activities

The power of potentates did not flow purely from the effective way in which they collected and consumed agricultural produce and other local trade, although this was the most important aspect of exchange. All the evidence points to them having used their surplus resources to support a range of specialized activities and hence to control the production and/or distribution of prestige goods (46). In turn these goods were used to win further clients, hence accelerating the process of taking – probably by violent means – since leaders required more to give away. In the absence of a monetary economy (coins were not minted in early historic Scotland), manipulation of these goods



46 Escutcheon mould from Craig Phádraig (66 mm / 2 1/2 in diameter) similar to a manufactured example from Castle Tioram, both in Highland. Both sites are interpreted as early historic power centres. Escutcheons for hanging bowls (which date from the mid-6th to late-7th century and beyond) are regularly found in Anglo-Saxon graves, but they may have been manufactured in Ireland, Scotland, or elsewhere in Britain (NMS).

47 Falconry scene on reverse of a cross-slab now within the grounds of Elgin Cathedral, Moray.



48 Part of a small cross-slab found at Wester Denoon, Angus. The figure is assumed to be that of a woman because of the centrally worn brooch.



was an important means of establishing new élites and extending authority over increasingly greater distances. Specialized craftworkers, particularly fine-metalworkers, appear to have largely confined their activities to high-status sites where their food requirements were provided by clients, leaving them free to ply their trade. The peripheral areas of sites appear to have been reserved for such industrial purposes. Dunadd has produced one of the most important post-Roman artefact assemblages in the British Isles (p. 67). There is evidence for specialized crucibles for gold and silver, the presence of top-quality Anglo-Saxon gold and garnet work, moulds for the manufacture of brooches related to the famous Tara brooch (now in the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin) and Hunterston brooch (49), and moulds for the production of brooches with bird heads and interlace (Celtic in form but Anglo-Saxon in style). In the meantime the potentates were able to employ their excess material resources and physical energies in a wide range of exclusive activities, such as horse breeding (the outer enclosures at some forts may have been for stabling horses), falconry (47), hunting and preparation for military campaigns. Training and management of the horses would have required the services of grooms, as well as large quantities of fodder.

Among the fine objects produced by the metalworkers on these sites are 7th- and 8th-century penannular and annular brooches, which Irish law tracts and earlier British poetry suggest would have been worn in Scotland and Ireland as status symbols (Nieke 1993). Sculpture shows them to have been worn singly, either on the shoulder (for men) or breast (women; 48). This idea may have been adopted from the late-Roman use of brooches as

insignia of office. It might even have been an attempt to draw on Roman traditions of social organization and power in order to assert the legitimacy of their early historic owners. Gift giving was an important means of distributing largess in a non-monetary economy and so, by controlling the production of these brooches, the potentates were able to reinforce their social positions. In this way prestige goods might be used to dissolve old tribal structures and establish new élites. They could achieve this by determining to whom they might give such status symbols and from whom, in return, they could expect or extract loyalty and services. Gift giving had very much a contractual character in this period and objects of value could also be used to promote or seal political alliances.

The secular status of these brooches would appear to have been adopted by the higher echelons of the Church, whose members often came from the aristocracy. The brooches also incorporate decorative elements drawing on Christian iconography (49), although some of this is open to multiple interpretations. They would therefore have conveyed a Christian message to their wearer (whether a cleric or not) while the implied status was a motif understood by all ranks of society. Given the Church's role in legitimizing the status of potentates at this time (chapter 5), the inclusion of Christian iconography in jewellery was a graphic statement of this relationship.

The existence of enormous wealth is exemplified by both individual works of art and treasures such as those from St Ninian's Isle, Burgar and Norrie's Law. There must have been enormous competition to procure the services of the craftspeople who possessed these superlative artistic and technical skills.

Norrie's Law hoard, Fife

Very little survives of 'the greatest Pictish treasure ever to have been found' (Graham-Campbell 2002), a large hoard of silver objects discovered in 1819 at the foot of a prehistoric cairn. The amount of silver available in Pictland is exceptional; there seems to have been access to sources of late-Roman silver. Deposited in the mid/late 7th century (perhaps during a time of Northumbrian claims to overlordship of the area), the remaining finds from Norrie's Law include: three pins (one decorated with a Pictish symbol), two torques, a pair of unique oval plaques (both decorated with Pictish symbols: 50), a bossed disc and folded Roman spoons (hoarded for their value as scrap metal). The hoard therefore includes material spanning a very wide age range. Little credence can be given to the supposed inclusion of a shield, helmet and sword (items that are not often found in



49 Hunterston brooch, found in the 19th century in Ayrshire. Dated on art-historical grounds to c. 700, metalworking evidence from Dunadd shows this type of brooch has a mid-7th-century pedigree and could have been made in Argyll. Its form and decoration owe much to both Celtic and Anglo-Saxon traditions. Note the prominent cross motif in the central panel (NMS).



50 Two finds from the Norrie's Law hoard: silver plaques with incised decoration picked out in red enamel (NMS).



51 Some finds from the St Ninian's Isle treasure: bowls, brooches, mounts and chapes (NMS).

hoards), although several fragments seem to be from ceremonial weaponry.

St Ninian's Isle treasure, Shetland

This complete hoard was discovered in 1958 under a cross-incised stone slab, carefully placed in a larch box, at the east end of a medieval church where excavation

demonstrated the existence of an important early Christian foundation (see Barrowman 2003 for recent reinterpretation). An eclectic range of 28 decorated silver objects and the jawbone of a porpoise, it comprises eight bowls (one an Anglo-Saxon hanging bowl), probably tableware; a spoon and claw-like implement; a sword pommel and two elaborate sword chapes (one with a dedication – see 94 – the only metalwork early historic sword-fittings from Scotland); three cone-shaped mounts (for attachment to a sword-belt?) and 12 penannular brooches (51). Secular objects, they appear to have been the rich treasury of the church itself, or a third party who they were looking after them for, buried c. 800 due to Viking raids. The origin of some of the metalwork, notably the chapes, is a matter of some debate (Graham-Campbell 2001; 2002).

Broch of Bugar hoard, Orkney

In about the 1840s a remarkable hoard of up to eight silver vessels was found 'in the thickness of the wall' of one of the intramural cells of Broch of Bugar (Graham-Campbell 1985). One vessel was nearly filled with several silver combs of varying sizes, five or six silver pins, several fragments of silver chain and a large number of amber beads. Alas the hoard disappeared soon after discovery, but in the absence of coins it can be presumed to have been either Viking or Pictish (rather than late Roman), while the general range of artefacts suggests it may in fact be an 8th-century Pictish treasure, deposited when the Vikings began to raid the area. The bowl is described third-hand in 1859 (in not very good English!) as 'beautifully ornamented apparently stamped on it and



52 Small glass boss of 8th or 9th century from Dundurn, likely to have decorated a fine piece of metalwork, perhaps a reliquary (enlarged). See also p. 6. ©University of Glasgow

also having numerous projecting knobs on it', and there is the exciting possibility that this connects it to the so-called 'boss style' well known in late-8th century metalwork and sculpture throughout Scotland, but particularly Pictland (52; 70; front cover). Although it cannot be conclusively proved that this assemblage was Pictish, it seems beyond reasonable doubt that the artefacts would have once formed the property of a wealthy Orcadian. The amber (presumably from the east coast of England, or perhaps further afield in the Baltic) highlights the extent of trading contacts.

In addition to the production of such splendid and overtly ornate objects, there was also an increasing tendency to mass-produce smaller pieces of jewellery. These were needed to enable more frequent gifts to be given to the expanding number of followers that a potentate hoped to obtain. In addition to jewellery, the metalworkers could also have made ornate drinking horns, harness pieces and weapon fittings, as well as more mundane items such as decorated vessels or furniture.

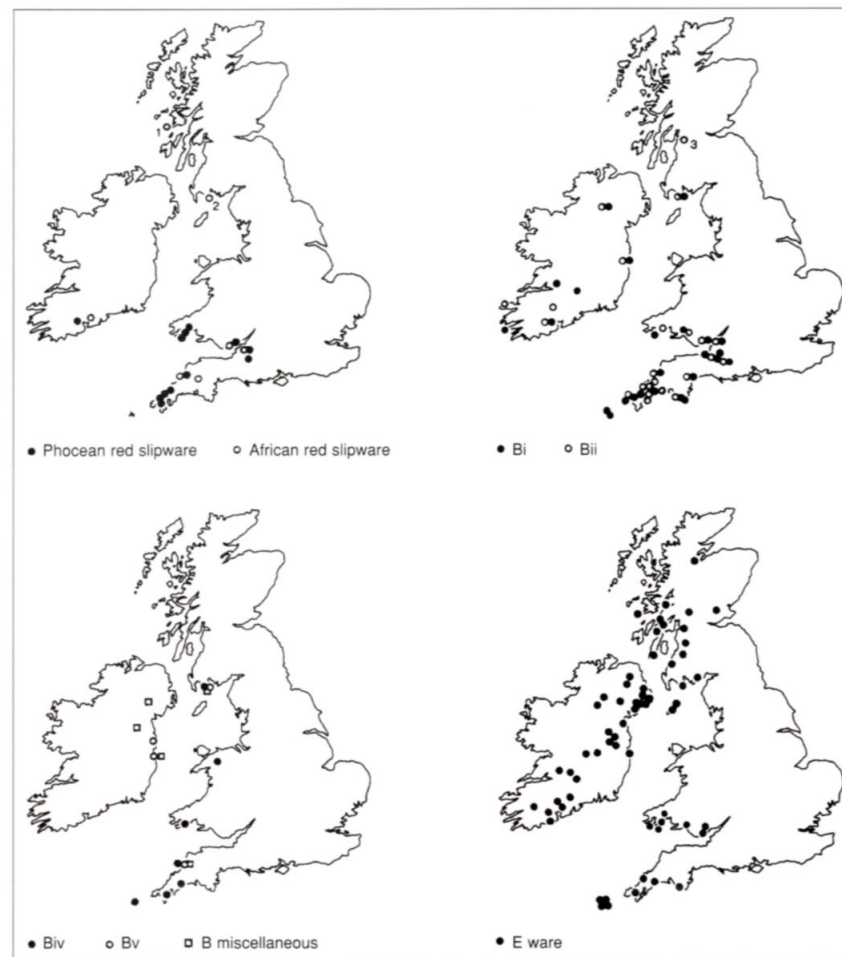
We might also expect these sites to have possessed smiths (as at Dunadd), high-status craftspeople who forged agricultural implements and weapons. Survival conditions were such that very little evidence has been found for either of these, but both were essential. Swords, like brooches, were also very important gifts for potentates to be able to bestow on their followers, as the heroic poems of the time emphasize. Horse gear is also likely to have been an important product of both the smith and fine-metalworker although, unlike in Ireland, surprisingly little direct evidence survives for this.

Trade

Power centres controlled local trade, and hence they were located at nodal points in the landscape, such as river-crossings (where they could oversee the movement of people, presumably collecting taxes as appropriate), or where there were important resources to control (as is suggested in relation to soapstone at Cunningsburgh, Shetland). In Argyll and Strathclyde some of them also orchestrated the acquisition and distribution of imported goods, which are found in western Britain and Ireland from the late 5th century to early 8th century (53; Campbell 1996a; 1996b). Four main types of imported pottery have been identified: A, B, D and E ware (C was discovered to be late medieval some time ago). The total number of vessels throughout the British Isles is still small, but from these, two successive trading systems have been identified.

Firstly, between the late 5th and mid-6th century there was a brief period of direct trading with the eastern Mediterranean. Various types of amphorae and jars (Bi from the Peloponnese; Bii from south-east Asia Minor; Biv from Sardis, Asia Minor; and Bvi from Gaza) and bowls (Phocaean red-slip ware from Asia Minor and the Aegean) were brought to south-west Britain, probably via North Africa where various other amphorae (Bv from Tunisia) and late-Roman bowls (African red-slip ware from Carthage) were added to the cargo. The amphorae were primarily containers for liquids, such as olive-oil and wine. These Mediterranean traders appear to have taken back with them metal: tin from Cornwall, and lead and silver from the Mendips and south Wales. Certain coastal forts (Tintagel in Cornwall, Cadbury Congresbury in Somerset and Dinas Powys in Wales) appear to have been major (presumably seasonal) trading centres, although significant but

53 Distribution of imported pottery in the British Isles: 1 Iona, 2 Whithorn, 3 Dumbarton Rock.



undefended sites are now also beginning to enter the equation and may have been trading under royal control, if they were not royal themselves. The small groups of sherds discovered in Scotland may simply represent redistribution from south-west Britain as a result of social and political links. On the other hand, the presence of a single sherd of African red-slip ware on Iona may simply emphasize the importance of this particular monastery and the exceptional breadth of its contacts from a very early date. The nature of the goods being traded from Scotland can only be guessed at – white furs, river pearls and rock crystal have been suggested, but more prosaic items such as woollen textiles or leather products, perhaps even hunting dogs (recorded as a British export by Strabo 500 years beforehand) or slaves are equally probable. An exquisitely carved wooden box (54)

from Evie in Orkney confirms the skills of the woodworker, while its contents were the tools of a leatherworker whose labours would probably have ranged from the production of shields, saddles, vellum and bridles to clothing. No doubt many of these formed part of the tribute that potentates demanded from their clients. This trading system ceased, perhaps when the Byzantine empire reimposed control over the western Mediterranean in the mid-6th century.

A second system appeared in the later 6th century and 7th century (with minor activity only in the early 8th). Mortaria and bowls (D ware, from the Bordeaux region), tableware and storage vessels (E ware, exact provenance unknown) were brought from Gaul, along with imported glass drinking vessels, to the Irish Sea zone. Glass vessels are also known to have existed from the documentary sources: the *Gododdin* refers to 'the wine of brimming glass vessels' and Columba caused the glass held by King Bridei's magician to shatter. Distant trade should not surprise us, for Adomnán describes the visit of Gaulish merchants between 565 and 597, and other sources also attest to regular contact between Gaul and the western British Isles during this period. The south-west of England was largely excluded from this trading cycle, perhaps because much of it was now under English control.

The E ware (which contained exotic goods such as dye) was almost certainly a space-filler for an intense, but short-lived, wine trade in which merchants specifically targeted this part of the British Isles. Together the wine, tableware and glass drinking vessels illustrate the importance that potentates placed on feasting. The perishable nature of such a cargo serves to remind us how much trade is simply invisible.

Dunadd (55) has produced the largest quantity of imported pottery from anywhere in the British Isles (the extent of its excavation could well be a contributory factor) and there is evidence from other finds of the extent of its inhabitant's network of contacts (56). Differences in the volume and type of E-ware vessels found at major centres such as Dunadd and the lesser dun and crannog sites within an 80 km (50 mi) radius suggest redistribution from the higher-status importation point to lesser sites in the near vicinity.

Reliance on the seaways for communication and trade is reflected in



54 Carved wooden box from Evie, Orkney (290 mm / 11 1/2 in long), C-14 dated to between the late-7th and early-9th centuries (NMS).



55 Dunadd fort with the Atlantic beyond.

The strength of belief



56 Sources of the imported material found at Dunadd (Alan Lane and Ewan Campbell).

the coastal distribution of many of the early historic power centres, in contrast to earlier defended sites of the Iron Age. Indeed, some may have been sited on the coast in a conscious attempt to control the availability of imported luxury goods. We must envisage significant social changes when the trade that included imported pottery dried up, northern European ports began to take over Continental trade, and towns were founded in England (such as *Hamwic*, modern Southampton). Elsewhere, kings sanctioned neutral places where trading could flourish, but there is no evidence yet of such places in Scotland. While major ecclesiastical sites such as Whithorn and Portmahomack might be argued to possess some proto-urban tendencies, we otherwise lack significant evidence for how trade developed and was

managed when power centres moved from the tops of hills to the valley bottoms. Scottish towns do not apparently develop until the 12th century, and of these only St Andrews and Perth developed from known Pictish centres (about which lamentably little is known).

Pictland's trading contacts are likely to have been primarily along the east coast, particularly with Northumbria, but perhaps as far afield as Frisia. A leaf-shaped spearhead found in the post-broch levels at Scalloway is thought to be a 6th- or 7th-century import from Kent. Evidence for direct links with Scandinavia at this time are still tenuous (but note the Scandinavian larch box that contained the St Ninian's Isle treasure, although this could also mean that the deposition was in Norse times).

Secular power centres were therefore often strategically sited symbolic manifestations of the authority and power of their inhabitants. But it is clear that they were primarily focal points for the collection, transformation and redistribution of tax and tribute from which potentates derived their wealth and much of their authority. Control of local trade was particularly important, since some of these resources were used to produce prestige goods, or were exchanged for imports used in the course of the royal activities of feasting and gift giving. Yet the power centres did not exist in a vacuum; they were part of a structured network of royal and noble sites through which agricultural wealth could be exploited. The early historic period saw the development of the means to extract such surplus from the land. Broad similarities exist between Pictland and Argyll, which should not surprise us given their proximity and close political interrelationship, but the greater agricultural wealth of Pictland may have precipitated a more sophisticated mechanism for land division and associated administration.

It is now time to turn to the evidence for the early Church, which not only played an active part in the early historic economy, but provided the ideological backbone for many of the social and political developments of the age.

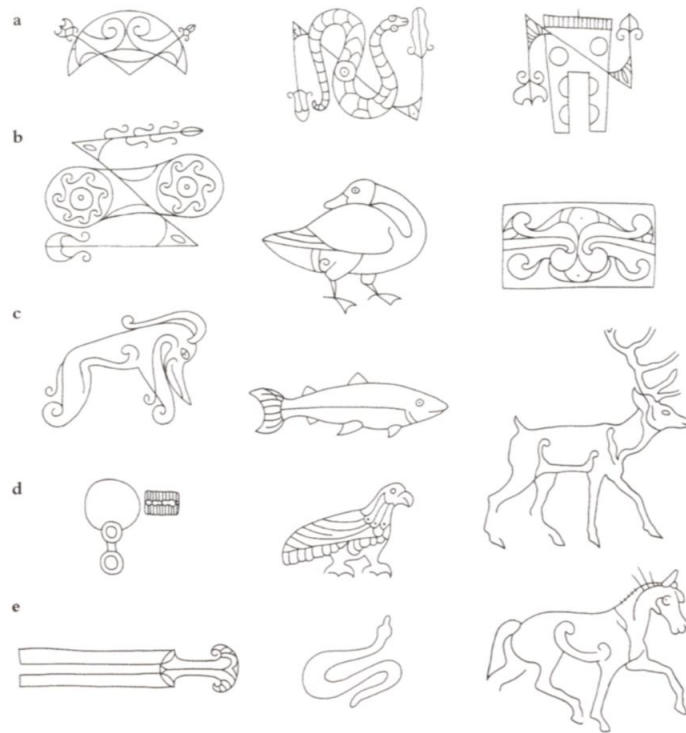
Christianity was the most significant force of change during the early historic period. By the early 10th century everyone in Scotland would have been familiar with Christian beliefs and none could have ignored the impact of its ideology or the might of its messengers. Its clerical leaders were major landowners, effectively secular potentates in all but name. Very often they came from important families and much of their activity was inseparably linked to the secular politics of the time. The point at which the aims and aspirations of the secular and religious élites gelled therefore marks a crucial stage in the development of kingship and the Scottish nation. The Church became a powerful ambassador for the kings with whom it worked to shape and nurture the ideal of a Christian ruler. The extent to which Christianity permeated the rural lay population dictated how effectively such messages might be conveyed. The clerics also brought with them – and may have had a virtual monopoly of – the technology of writing with Roman characters, a tool with the potential to radically affect the means by which society operated.

What we therefore need to examine is the inter-relationship between the Church, secular authorities and the rural population – and the role of literacy. But first, we must review pagan beliefs.

Pre-Christian beliefs

Pagan Celts believed in a pantheon of gods and a supernatural other-world; trees, hills, water, the sun and animals (wild, domesticated and fabulous) were all sacred to them, supported by an imaginative and colourful mythology (Green ed. 1995). We should envisage an annual round of festivities closely tied to the agricultural cycle and the concept of fertility. In contrast to today, religious beliefs and practices were apparently not compartmentalized separately from other aspects of daily life. Of particular interest in the Western Isles and Orkney is the special treatment of animal and human bones in deposits under and within houses (Mulville *et al.* 2003).

The likely role of druids or priests has been discussed in chapter 3. Meaningful evidence for cult beliefs in early medieval Scotland is lacking, although there are *aber-* (river-mouth) names perhaps associated with goddesses or similar (Nicolaisen 1997) and *nemeton-* places hint at pre-Christian sacred groves and/or sanctuaries (Barrow 1998), neither being the type of place that can necessarily be detectable archaeologically. The potential ascription of places and activities to pagan beliefs begs the question of when the peoples of Scotland first became Christian and where the so-called Pictish symbols fit into this larger picture.



57 Examples of Pictish symbols: (a) crescent and V-rod, (b) double disc and Z-rod, (c) Pictish beast, (d) mirror and comb, (e) sword.

58 Cannel coal pendant in Inverness Museum. A portable symbol-bearing cross-slab?



Pictish symbols

A unique range of at least 50 designs (57) have been found incised, usually in groups of at least two, on undressed stones (more than 200 examples of so-called symbol-incised stones are known), cave walls or rock outcrops and silver jewellery or miscellaneous objects such as bone objects and stone pebbles. Some of these same designs have also been found carved in relief on more than 60 dressed stones that also include Christian iconography (so-called symbol-bearing cross-slabs). The majority of these designs have therefore been found on what can be described as monumental sculpture or high-status objects, while the cruder and more informal versions tend to be found on bone and smaller stone objects (58). They might also have been used in other media: wood, leather, textiles and possibly body decoration (until we find the Scottish equivalent of a bog- or ice-person we cannot confirm this).

Ideas abound for what constitutes a Pictish symbol (as opposed to other form of repeated design that might have been unique to the Picts), the meaning such designs conveyed, what we can say about the objects they are found on, and what this means for our understanding of Pictish society as a whole. Some of the designs incorporate elements of a distinctive art style known as La Tène – associated with the immediately pre-Roman Iron Age culture of the Celts across north-western Europe and named after its type site in Switzerland. Until very recent the currency of objects in this style was thought to have ceased in the 1st or 2nd centuries but 7th-century finds such as those from Dunadd, and the Clonmore shrine in Ireland (Bourke 2002), show that it was still current in the mid-1st millennium. A second significant development has been the suggestion that some of the designs might represent language rather than ideas (totemic symbols of lineage, indicators of rank, clan and profession, and so on), although

this is a model that still requires further detailed study.

Of the 50-plus designs to which the name 'symbol' has sometimes been applied, Forsyth (1997b) has observed that only 33 of these ever occur in pairs when used on formal sculptures – what she describes as the 'fundamental syntax of extant symbol texts'. These 'core symbols' are predominantly geometric, abstract designs and do not include many of the individual animals sometimes otherwise described as 'symbols', although we have no reason to believe that all these designs were not in circulation at around the same time. If we seek a meaning for these visually appealing, naturalistic animals it is probably in their religious and symbolic value – the same reason they were depicted elsewhere in the Celtic world. Each animal traditionally possessed specific attributes and associations that their artists may have been trying to evoke and might perhaps have related to a cult belief (note the concentration of bulls at Burghead, pp. 42–3, for instance).

In the past there have been many attempts to associate certain designs with earlier Iron Age (even Roman) objects, a relationship that has not been easy to prove and becomes less necessary when we recognize that La Tène-style abstract designs are being created so much later than previously thought. The only core symbol that does indeed seem to be representational is the 'mirror and comb' that occurs in a fifth to a quarter of all cases, often at the base of a series of already paired designs. It is therefore being used in some way to qualify the other symbols with which it occurs. The best parallels for the mirror form depicted are examples from throughout Britain, including Balmaclellan in Dumfries and Galloway, thought to be Iron Age in date. At least three forms of the comb are known and an apparently later form is represented on symbol-bearing cross-slabs. 'Mirror and comb' are conventionally interpreted as a female signifier (see for instance 45, 48 and 59) although we should note the importance of long hair and moustaches to early medieval male status. This relationship is far from proven.

There are two other ways in which symbols are qualified, by the addition of a V-shaped 'rod' (sometimes Z- or N-shaped), and (in the crescent and double-disc symbols) by the presence of a small penannular notch. There is a consistency in the use of the rod: the crescent is often overlain by a V-rod and the double disc by a Z-rod, but never the other way round (although the Z-rod sometimes overlies other symbols). It may be no coincidence that the crescent (see 57a) and double disc (see 57b) are two of the three designs that have a widespread distribution or occur more than 20 times; these are also the symbols singled out for the most elaborate decoration (60). Forsyth suggests that the rods should also be seen as representational in some way. The third most common symbol is



59 This symbol-incised slab from Dairy Park at Dunrobin, Highland, overlay the burial of a woman.



60 Pictish beast, double disc and Z-rod, and other designs on a symbol-bearing cross-slab from Brodie, Moray. The ogham inscription around this slab is so damaged by weathering that few of its 70 or so characters can now be read. © Tom Gray. Tom and Sybil Gray Collection

61 Plaque from Monifieth Laws, Angus, possibly made of base silver (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland).



the so-called Pictish beast, or 'swimming elephant' (see 57c), apparently a dolphin or perhaps the fantastic kelpie or water-horse of later Scottish folklore.

The fact that a people who were clearly capable of outstanding naturalistic representation of animals and humans, indeed apparently enjoyed sketching (O'Meadhra 1993), should have opted to design and employ such a uniform, largely abstract and geometric system is obviously something that merits further consideration. Most of these designs only ever had a two-dimensional existence. A lost, probably 8th-century, crescentic metal plaque from Monifieth Laws represents the crescent and V-rod with, on its reverse, two other designs (61). It demonstrates that some designs could also exist in their own right but, effectively, still only in two dimensions.

Forsyth's suggestion is therefore that what she identifies as the 'core' symbols represent a language and are probably being used to name people. The majority of post-Roman inscribed British sculptures in Scotland and other early medieval monumental inscriptions in the British Isles and Scandinavia consist largely or solely of personal names, as indeed is the case with the examples of Scottish ogham inscriptions (p. 20), and it would be perverse in the absence of evidence to the contrary to suggest that this might not also be the case in Pictland (see also Samson 1992). Particularly attractive aspects of her theory include the observations that knowledge of this symbolism is clearly not restricted to a small group of people; they can have meaning in a range of different contexts; and that, if a language, the implementation of such a uniform system in an apparently relatively short period of time and without any visible phase of experimentation can be comfortably explained (although we should note the possibility of experimentation on organic media that have not survived). If this is a

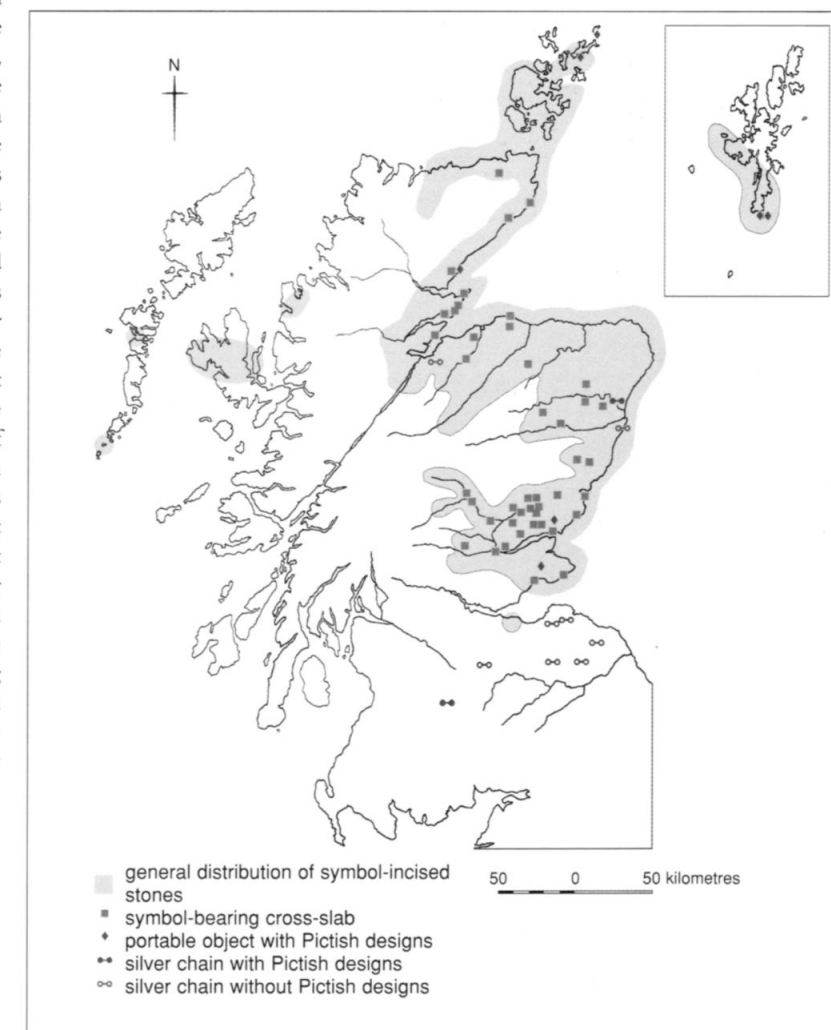
representation of language, the decline of such a system could also be attributed to the rise of Gaelic. This theory can also explain why the symbols were acceptable on Christian monuments, since there is nothing inherently pagan about a language. If the symbols do represent a language, then the significance of its deployment on such monuments needs consideration not just in terms of what might be being said but also in terms of the value that attaches to this symbolic system as a whole in a period when language was seen as a natural index of social affiliation (Driscoll 1998a).

Designs on stones, intents in design

The majority of surviving Pictish designs and symbols are found on symbol-incised stones and symbol-bearing cross-slabs (62). Most are confined to the fertile lowlands of the east coast, with symbol-incised stones predominating to the north of the Mounth, symbol-bearing cross-slabs to the south.

We have seen above how the most likely interpretation, regardless of whether or not the symbols represent a language, is that they are referring to named individuals in some way. As such, the most convincing interpretations of the symbol-incised stones are either as memorials to the dead (although not necessarily placed over the corpses) and/or charters in stone, erected by descendants to legitimize their inheritance of land. Early Welsh and Irish inscribed stones are interpreted in a similar way (Edwards 2001). Other theories, dependent on alternative understandings of what the symbols stood for, have included testimonies to marriage alliances between matrilineal clans or statements of tribal affiliation. The obvious question is what the context in which the symbols and designs are used can tell us about the function of the monuments and objects on which they are found. We know the symbols could be used in a Christian context on symbol-bearing cross-slabs, but what is their relevance in other contexts to pre-Christian or Christian belief systems? Much depends on the date in which these symbol-bearing objects are being manufactured and used. In exploring this, we have to consider that some of the symbols may

62 Distribution of Pictish early sculpture and associated artwork. This is concentrated in good agricultural land along the coast and river valleys. Note the more limited distribution of symbol-bearing cross-slabs in comparison to symbol-incised stones. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved Historic Scotland Licence No. 100017509 2004



have had a currency that pre-dates their use and specific meaning on the early symbol stones, a fact that might further explain the La Tène-style influences.

Symbol-bearing cross-slabs can be fairly reliably dated on art-historical and historical grounds to around the early 8th century onwards. Symbol-incised stones have long been held to post-date 500, the traditional date for the arrival of the Dál Riata, because of their absence in Argyll. But, as we have seen (p. 9), this marker date need no longer be of any relevance. Unfortunately, few symbol-incised stones have been recovered from their original locations under scientific archaeological conditions. Where monumental examples of such finely carved stones have been recovered there often seems to be an association with types of burial broadly dating to between the 4th and 8th centuries (see below). Dating evidence for the existence of such symbols is otherwise art-historical, on the basis of the other attributes of the objects (often non-monumental) on which they occur, and/or of the designs themselves (often apparently atypical). In a couple of instances, symbols are found on heavy silver chains of north British origin that are thought to be 5th or 6th century in date (Thomas 1995; 63). They are also found on two identical leaf-shaped plaques (possibly related to Roman votive plaques) and a hand-pin for fastening clothing from Norrie's Law that are thought to have been deposited in the 7th century.

Turning to the few scientifically dated contexts, these all come from northern Scotland. On the basis of C-14 dating, the deposit of a stone slab bearing roughly pecked symbols – patently not the work of a skilled mason – marked the construction of a 6th-century house at Pool. Between 1998 and 2002 excavations at Old Scatness have led to the discovery of three symbol-incised objects (Dockrill *et al.* 2003). A small boulder incised with a pig or boar and a pebble incised with a crude arch and another abstract symbol are associated with Structure 5, a multi-cellular structure that was probably constructed between the 5th and 7th centuries. A small slab skilfully carved with a bear may have been

built into one of the triangular piers of a wheelhouse (see 44), the construction of which is as yet undated but on architectural grounds is likely to be before Structure 5. None of these archaeological examples can be used to date the erection of symbol-incised stones, although they suggest that some of the designs were probably in existence around the 5th or 6th century. The bear is significant because such a date would add weight to the art-historical argument that the Northumbrians got the idea for some of the animals that appear in their manuscripts from the Picts (for example, the late 7th-century Echternach Gospels, the Lindisfarne Gospels of c.715–20 and the late 7th-/early 8th-century Book of Durrow) and not vice versa (Henderson 1967).

63 'North British' silver chain from Whitecleugh, South Lanarkshire, one of twelve examples of such chains, two of which have terminals that are decorated with Pictish designs (480 mm / 19in long, 1731 g / 61 oz). Virtually nothing is known about their final contexts, but they are likely to have been ritually deposited.



On the basis of the above dating, we might infer that this symbolism was first being used in Pictland at a time when its inhabitants would have been aware that some of their fellow Picts and neighbours were Christian (see below), if they were not already Christian themselves. What light can context shed on this?

North of the Mounth it has been observed that symbol-incised stones have a tendency to cluster close to conspicuous prehistoric ritual sites, notably stone circles and henges, indicating either a cult centre and/or centre of population (Inglis 1987; 64). Sometimes, as at Ardlair and Brandsbutt (Aberdeenshire) and Edderton (Highland), the symbols have been drawn directly on to prehistoric standing stones. The re-use of pagan sites is an established Christian practice but it is impossible to say whether or not such monuments were created under the influence of Christianity, or even in reaction to it. However, we can suggest that the Picts may have been deliberately trying to associate themselves with monuments of past significance and in doing so they created places in which their own rituals could be enacted.

Some of the symbol-incised stones are associated with burials. Unfortunately, archaeologists are finding it increasingly difficult to establish with confidence whether burials in what we might call the conversion period are Christian or otherwise; we cannot assume that all unaccompanied long-cist burials are Christian although those from the period when this burial type was most common certainly are. Until such time as the church took complete control of burial rites, we might anticipate families and communities retaining some of the burial practices with which they were familiar if these did not overtly contradict their new beliefs. Given



64 The portrayal of a single, perhaps mythical, human figure is unusual. This carving from Barflat, Aberdeenshire, is associated with a crop-mark enclosure that originally contained eight stones, two of which bear incised figures.

65 Whitebridge: a rare example of an upstanding Pictish cemetery. Photo by R. Gourlay © Highland Council



the Christian practice of erecting grave markers for named individuals, we have to bear in mind the possibility that the symbol-bearing stones are the Pictish, possibly Christian, equivalent of these. However, we should note that the distribution of long-cist cemeteries and symbol-incised stones is largely mutually exclusive, and if not simply a matter of ethnicity this may hint at a pagan context for the latter. Symbol-incised stones have been found in association with burials at Ackergill, Watenan, Garbeg and Dunrobin in Highland, and probably also Brough of Birsay. C-14 dating of skeletons from excavations has determined that some long cists under square or circular platforms of earth or stone, or low stone kerbs, date to between the 4th/5th and 8th centuries. The square barrows sometimes share a common side and their surrounding ditches are likely to be interrupted at the corners (65); stone pillars sometimes mark the corners of the cairns. Once thought to be confined to eastern and northern Scotland, examples of such burials and their associated enclosures, sometimes very large, are now also recognized in Argyll (see 11), the Western Isles, and Dumfries and Galloway. Most are known only from crop marks; there is a square barrow and circular enclosure to the immediate north-east of the Collessie stone (see 2), for example. The majority of burials in this period are extended inhumations, sometimes in wooden coffins, often in long cists. However, at the extensive cemetery at Hermisgarth on Sanday, Orkney, evidence has been found for cremation that may be contemporary with inhumation under a low cairn (Ashmore 2003). Similarly, a short cist at Easterton of Roseisle, Moray, incorporated a symbol-incised stone and possibly contained a cremation, as did one of a group of similar undated burials overlying the broch at Oxtro, Orkney, which also included a stone urn.

Given the wide date spans that attach to the dated burial monuments and the uncertainty regarding the date when Christianity first made a significant impact in northern Scotland (see below), what can we say with confidence about the practice of erecting symbol-incised stones over select graves? We can infer that these relate in some way to named individuals and are perhaps overt statements of the transfer of inheritance from one generation to another. We can also note that the carving of such designs required enormous technical skills and physical resources that would only have been accessible to the élite. The same applies to the high-quality metalwork on which the designs have also been found. However, we do know that the symbols might be carved in more informal contexts on a wider range of objects, but generally without the 'syntax' of their use on the stones (though factors of survival and recovery inevitably limit what we know about potential other contexts and their distribution). Where such monuments were sited in the landscape, and how this related to the organization of land, remains a subject with scope for future study. But what are the circumstances that led to the formalization of these permanent and public testimonies?

The growth of the Pictish kingdom and the appearance of this standardized symbolic system apparently occurred at the same time, under the control of a political and/or religious élite. If a historical context is sought for this, we might look to the reigns of Bridei son of Mailcon (died c. 585), king of at least northern Pictland, and his immediate descendants, or the late-7th-century activities of Bridei son of Beli. The creation and/or promotion of a means of establishing and/or reinforcing the position and status of key members in society would have been very important. The monuments and their

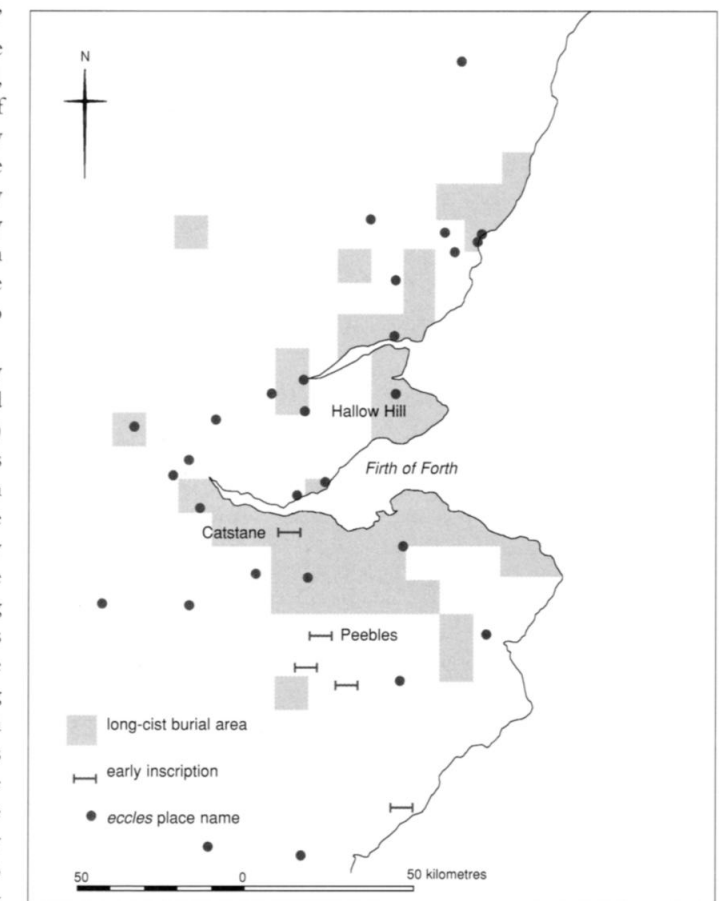
imagery/text reflect the wider religious/political beliefs of the local community, which accepted a social structure in which certain powerful individuals had authority, and under whose influence, if not physical presence, these monuments were erected.

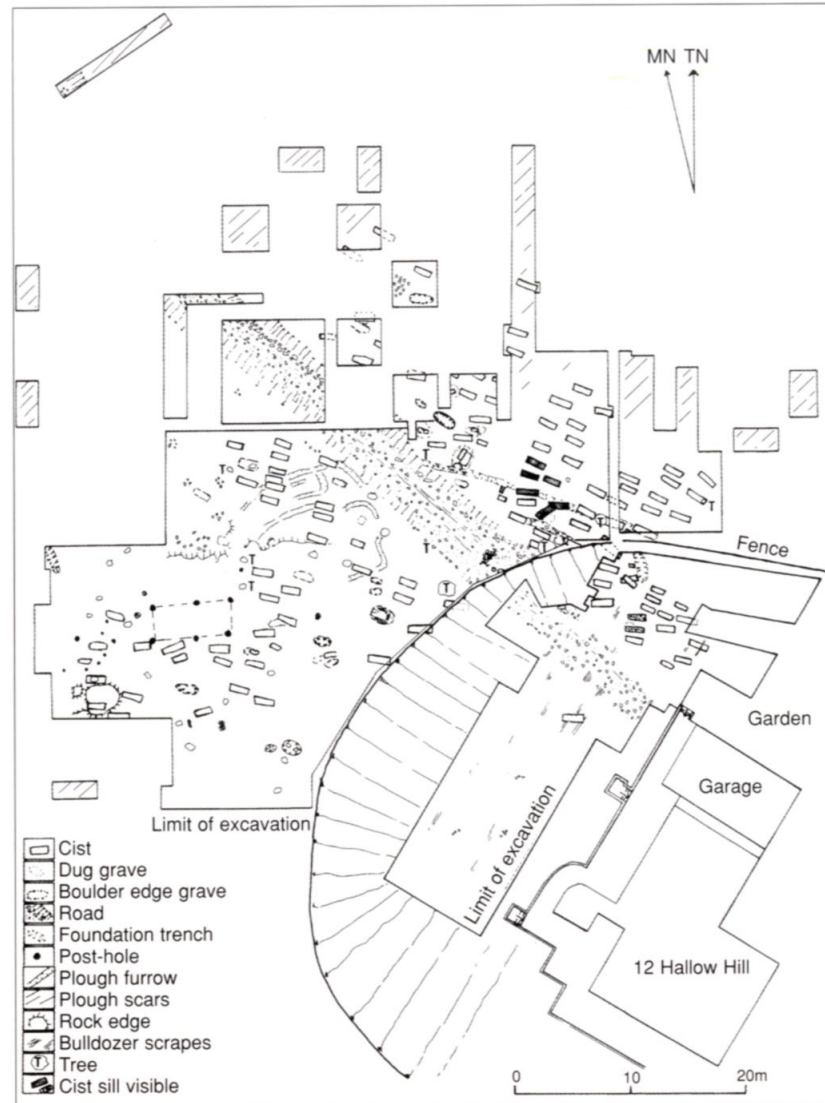
Sub-Roman Church

The Columban Church was not the first to introduce Christianity to Pictland. Bede recorded a tradition that Ninian had introduced Christianity to the southern Picts. Clancy (2001b; see also Fraser 2002) makes the convincing case for the elusive Ninian being a scribal error for Uinniau (St Finnian, d. 579), a Briton who also worked in Ireland, where he was Columba's teacher. He appears to have been sent to serve as bishop at – less probably to found – the monastery at Whithorn, a place that had developed from a late Roman-period trading settlement. The extent to which there was a 'Ninianic' mission in Scotland (largely south of the Antonine Wall) is also being questioned, but as the late-5th-century inhabitants of Dumbarton Rock were Christian, why not their immediate neighbours to the east, who might as well be influenced by their southern Christian neighbours as by those from south-west Scotland? When Columba met Bridei son of Mailcon he may well have been talking to a king who was already Christian (Fraser 2003).

Evidence for sub-Roman Christianity is derived from the presence of inscribed stones, the distribution of *eccles-* ('church') place names, and long-cist cemeteries (66). Long-cist cemeteries are found in the coastal tracts on both sides of the Forth, around the Fife coast and the Tay estuary, but caution is needed since we now know that Scottish burials in long cists without grave goods can date from as early as the 2nd century and therefore pre-date the advent of Christianity (Greig *et al.* 2000). Evidence for a sub-Roman Church, organized on the basis of dioceses with bishops, has been suggested in the surviving distribution of *eccles-* place names, which are taken to imply important early churches related to secular centres (Barrow 1983), but many

66 Distribution of *eccles-* place names, long-cist burials and early inscriptions in south-east Scotland. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved Historic Scotland Licence No. 100017509 2004





67 Plan of the cemetery excavated at Hallow Hill (Edwina Proudfoot/Society of Antiquaries of Scotland).

of these are now no longer thought to be so early (Clancy 2001b; Taylor 1998). Inscribed stones are a more reliable indicator of a Christian presence, although they can be difficult to date precisely. A late-7th/early-8th-century inscribed stone from Peebles refers to a bishop Neitan. When inscribed stone, *eccles-* name and unaccompanied long-cist burials coincide we can be more confident that these provide proof of Christian beliefs. At Kirkliston (Edinburgh airport) a late-6th/early-7th-century long-cist cemetery was centred around the Catstane, a late 6th-century inscription. It has been established that the historically known name *Eglesnamin* is to be equated with a large long-cist cemetery at Hallow Hill, on the edge of modern St Andrews. Excavation there did not locate a definite church, but part of a complex 6th–9th-century cemetery was excavated (67).

With such scant evidence to go on, very little can be said about how

willingly individuals and communities took to this new religion and how they sought to reconcile their old and new belief systems. The early symbiotic relationship of the new religion and local élites is perhaps suggested by the localized distribution of place names and inscriptions associated with saints Serf (6th century) in the Forth valley and Strathearn area and Itarnan (d. 669) in the Fife area, and the evidence for their intensive patronage. Excavations at St Ethernan's Priory on the Isle of May, in the mouth of the Firth of Forth, have encountered a cemetery with origins in the 5th or 6th century and evidence for segregation of male and mixed burials. Kilrenny, the nearest landfall, is a name that probably evolved from an 8th-century original meaning 'church/chapel of Ethernan', while from nearby Scoonie a symbol-bearing cross-slab has an ogham inscription referring to 'Ethernarnus'. These are native saints who may have had direct associations with local royalty and need have had no associations with the Gaelic church (Taylor 1996). If so, the distribution of their cults may represent the 'eroded footprints' of ancient polities (Driscoll 1998a). If these cults relate to episcopates, then Abercorn and St Andrews/Hallow Hill are the most likely candidates for the bishops' seats (Fraser 2003).

The Columban Church in Argyll

Although some of the Dál Riata may have been converted beforehand, Christianity first makes its recognizable mark in western Scotland with the arrival of Columba in 563. Later to be made a saint, he was an important member of the Irish Uí Néill dynasty who chose to lead a mission to Scotland in penance for misdemeanours. Columba based himself on Iona (68), a small but fertile island off the western tip of Mull – land donated by a king who we might envisage already being Christian. Its significance stemmed from Columba's social status and the enthusiasm and successes of his followers. Iona became a renowned centre of scholarship and artistic excellence, as is evident from its surviving poetry (Clancy and Márkus 1995) and sculpture (Fisher 2001). The Book of Kells is also likely to have been made there, and possibly the Book of Durrow (though this is more often assigned a Northumbrian origin). The monastery's international contacts were extraordinary: it played a leading role in the conversion of Northumbria; was one of the most important Irish religious centres in Europe; and ultimately gained supremacy over the Pictish Church in the mid-9th century. We can contrast this with Wilfrid of Ripon's unfavourable, if rhetorical, comparison of Iona with Rome at the time of the Synod of Whitby (664), as reported by Bede: 'one remote corner of the most remote island ... isolated at the uttermost ends of the earth' (*History* III, 25).

Christianity was brought to Ireland in the first half of the 5th century when, at the request of the pope, several bishops appear to have been active in Ireland under the initial leadership of Palladius. However, Patrick, whose mission probably began in the 460s and who died around 493, has tended to be given credit for much of this work (Bourke 1993). The early Irish Church was organized on the basis of dioceses (ecclesiastical territories under the care of a bishop), but Patrick encouraged the monastic ideal (of monks living a religious life, bound by vows and in obedience to a rule under the care of an abbot). Monasticism had become the primary factor by the late 6th century, but overall there was not a uniform pattern and a neat distinction cannot always be drawn between the two types of organization. Such diversity was also the case in Scotland, as we shall see.

As a remote island, Iona was clearly intended to be a place of monastic asceticism (Márkus 1999). Adomnán provides a vivid account of life on Iona, which can be complemented by the surviving field remains and evidence from small-scale excavations (69a). The physical development of the monastery is scarcely understood, but at its greatest it may have been up to 8 ha (20 acres) in extent. A rectilinear vallum with rounded corners defined a symbolic and

68 Iona, general view. Note the earthwork vallum.



legal boundary. Much of its ditch, with inner and outer banks, can still be traced on the ground, possibly incorporating an earlier Iron Age feature. There is also the suggestion of a smaller annexe, and the alignment of both may have changed early during the site's history (RCAHMS 1982; O'Sullivan 1999).

Within this enclosure, which had subdivisions, we might expect to find the buildings described by Adomnán: the church with an attached chamber; a number of working- or sleeping-huts for the monks; Columba's sleeping-hut; a hut 'built in a higher place' and used by him for writing; a house or houses where guests were accommodated; and a communal building, probably containing a kitchen and refectory. The existence of a smithy is also implied. The original church and library is thought to lie in the vicinity of the medieval abbey, and probably consisted of a timber predecessor to the surviving later stone chapel traditionally known as 'St Columba's Shrine' (97). Adomnán describes the use of oak timbers and wattle for buildings, and excavations have recovered the remains of circular or oval buildings and a probable rectangular building, which was constructed either with sill beams or vertically set planking.

As in Irish monasteries, activities appear to have been zoned, whether for industrial activities (fine-metalworking, leatherworking and woodworking took place at Iona) or to define levels of sanctity. The most important burials took place around the church, but

there was also a major cemetery (used for royal burial) at Reilig Odhráin (St Oran's Shrine, next to the monastery), where the second-largest collection of early Christian funerary monuments in the British Isles, after Clonmacnois in Ireland, has been found. There may also have been several other chapels.

Crosses were used to mark burials and define areas of sanctity, and as preaching posts. A group of three splendid high crosses, probably spanning the mid- to late-8th century, were located near the central church, and a further high cross may have also marked a probable entrance to the monastery by Reilig Odhráin. Their form and style owe much to the cultural and intellectual interaction between Iona, Pictland, Ireland and Northumbria (70).

Beyond the monastery, Adomnán describes more than one barn as well as a shed, fields and trackways, where the monks practised a mixed farming economy. Grain was undoubtedly ground at a horizontal water mill (yet to be found), the large millstones from which were already

being used as a cross-base in Adomnán's time. Iona was therefore a largely self-sufficient community, but with access to distant resources (such as building timbers or stone for carving). Although not directly involved in overseas trade, she acquired exotica from the local power centres.

By the time of Adomnán the monastery was at the peak of its power. Its abbot was the head of a monastic confederacy spanning both sides of the North Channel, all subject to the mother house, and had considerable political influence (Veitch 1997; Fraser 2003).

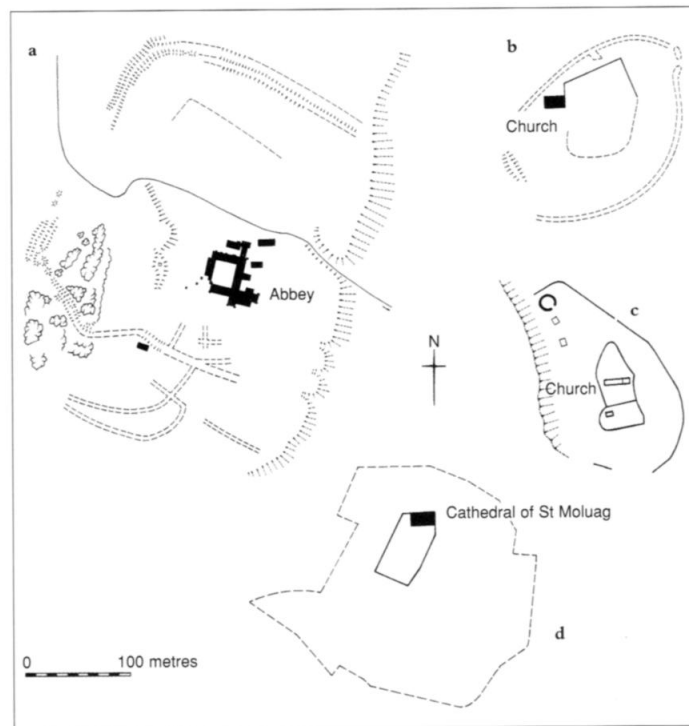
Other Gaelic churches

There were also important non-Columban churches in Scotland, founded by other saints such as Mo Luóc (from Bangor, County Down), with his main monastery at Lismore (69d). The role of these other churches tends to be underplayed because so much more is known about the Columban Church, and because it came to play such an important role in Pictland. Several monasteries were founded by the great navigator, Brendan of Clonfert. Donnán of Eigg made an attempt to evangelize the Pictish north-west (a carved slab from Kildonnan is notable for its Pictish parallels). Maelrubai (also from Bangor, County Down) followed on his successes in this area and established Applecross (673) in what at that time would still have been Pictish territory (69b). Dedications in Easter Ross and connections with the sculpture of St Vigean provide further evidence of such a link (71). Further south, Kingarth (Bute) was founded by a 6th-century native of the island, Bláán (69c); the monastery on the adjacent small island of Inchmarnock seems likely to have been related to this.

Archaeology of the church in the west

Recognition of early Christian sites in general is dependent on: place names; the size and shape of the enclosure; or the presence of early carvings, early burials, early church buildings or a well. The name elements cill-, kil- (from Latin cella, chapel), or annait (church in superior position to others) may belong to the period c. 500–900 and,

69 Comparative plans of (a) Iona, (b) Applecross, (c) Kingarth and (d) Lismore (literally 'great enclosure'). There are no remains of early Christian character at Lismore although field boundaries (as indicated) may perpetuate some of the line of the vallum.



70 St Martin's Cross, Iona. Stylistically this relates to St John's (replica in background) and St Oran's crosses (Iona) and Kildalton (see 72). Slots cut into the ends of the arms may have been used to hold applied decorative metalwork (Crown copyright: RCAHMS). The Picts may have contributed to the development of sculpture at Iona, but under the supervision of Irish designers skilled in metalwork and manuscripts (Fisher 2001).

71 Close similarities between the spiral designs at St Vigean (left) and Applecross (detail) (Crown copyright: RCAHMS) hint at artistic links despite the distance between them.



especially when combined with the name of an early saint, imply an early foundation. This equation becomes more complicated for those saints who had a long popularity or were the subject of later cults. Chapels cannot always be dated on the basis of field remains alone, but an early date can be suggested when they are associated with circular enclosures and/or early carvings. In the case of Kildalton (Islay), the spectacular late-8th-century cross hints that there may have been a monastery here since such crosses are usually only found in monastic contexts (72). Circular enclosures, perhaps reused settlements, may have been used for burial as in Ireland, and are likely to have been some of the earliest Christian monuments. The apparent absence of internal structures (as for example at Cill-an-Suidhe, Lismore; 73c) may be due to their timber construction. As elsewhere, the recognition of

Christian burials is not always easy due to the lack of dateable grave goods and the unreliability of burial orientation as a guide. Continuity from pagan to Christian sites appears common: a surprising number of sites are associated with wells, which were believed to have healing properties; earlier burials precede some chapels (as at St Ninian's Point, Bute, which overlies north-south oriented burials); and place names such as Cladh a'Bhile, 'burial ground of the sacred tree', recall pagan beliefs and practices. The sanctification of prehistoric monuments by the addition of at least a cross has also been noted at a small number of sites.

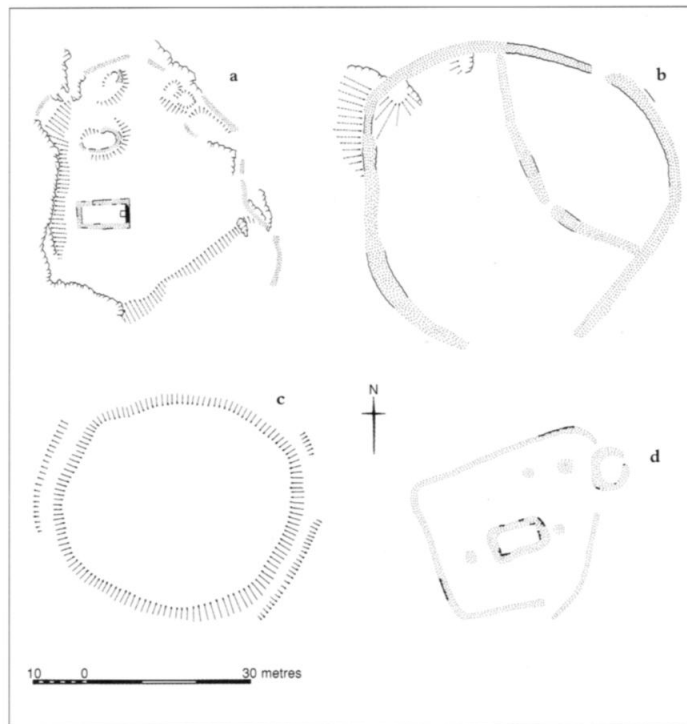
In terms of field remains, we can then recognize a range of early Christian sites: large monasteries, lesser religious communities, eremitic sites, caves, chapels, preaching stations and burial grounds. Large enclosures, such as at Cladh a'Bhearnaig (see 73b) or Ardnadam (Cowal) may have been small monasteries, in the former case close to the important secular fort of Dunollie. For those preferring more austere lifestyles, there were Ceann a'Mhara (see 73a), Eileach an Naoimh (founded by St Brendan of Clonfert in the Garvellachs) (74, 75) or Sgòr nam Ban-Naomha (76). Caves containing early Christian carvings, such as King's Cave (Arran) or Scoor (Mull) may have been the retreats of individuals that subsequently became places of pilgrimage.

The Gaelic Church and wider society

We need to know more about the nature of the relationship between the church in Scotland and the laity if we are to understand how Christianity affected early historic society. If we look to Ireland, then we see that the monasteries effectively formed separate tribes that coexisted alongside their secular equivalents, their leaders sharing the same interests. Abbacies were often hereditary and it was common for one branch of a ruling family to hold the kingship while another controlled the abbacy. We know that the Ionan abbacy tended to stay with Columba's kin and that he was closely involved in secular politics. Kings not only visited him, but he perhaps ordained one of them, Aedán mac Gabráin, and accompanied him the following year to Druim Cett (County Derry) where a meeting had been convened. We find Adomnán playing a similarly high-profile role in 697 when he negotiated acceptance

72 Kildalton Cross, east face. At the top of the shaft sits the Virgin and Child with angels, while around the hollow central boss (defined by animals) are scenes from the Old Testament: Cain murdering Abel; David killing the lion; and the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham.





73 Comparative plans of lesser early Christian sites: (a) Ceann a'Mhara, Tiree, (b) Cladh a'Bhearnaig, Kerrera, (c) Cill-an-Suidhe, Lismore, and (d) Cill Chaitriona, Colonsay.

to send a bishop by whose teaching and ministry the English people over whom he ruled might receive the blessings of the Christian Faith and the sacraments ... Henceforward many Irish arrived day by day in Britain and proclaimed the word of God with great devotion ... while those of them who were in priest's orders ministered the grace of baptism to those who believed. Churches were built ... and the people flocked gladly to hear the word of God (Bede, *History* III, 3).

Having spent time in exile in Argyll, Oswald had presumably learnt there that bishops were necessary for such missionary work. We see something similar when the Columban Church worked in Pictland (see below), but need to remember that in Adomnán's account we see Columba's intentions through the lens of a politically astute and active abbot, writing at least a century after the events he describes.

The precise mechanisms by which the Columban church might have provided pastoral care in Argyll are unknown, but we must presume the establishment of churches expressly for this purpose. The extent to which communities had their own (timber) churches is of course another unknown, and such buildings would anyway have been too small to receive large congregations. The sculpted stones and free-standing crosses or open-air altars

of his *Law of Innocents* by the kings of Ireland, Argyll and Pictland at the Synod of Birr, County Offaly (Márkus 1997).

The picture becomes more complicated when we turn to the role of the clergy in relation to the population at large. In Ireland and Wales it is apparent that the distinction between cloistered monks who lived enclosed lives according to a rule and secular clergy who provided pastoral care to the wider community is blurred and not helped by the terminology we use. The Irish Church was also under pressure from the laity to provide more pastoral care.

Gilbert Márkus (1999) suggests Adomnán had a mental 'spiritual map' in which he perceived Iona itself as a place of asceticism (effectively a cloister, cut off from the rest of the world), Argyll as the place where it fulfilled a pastoral role, and Pictland as the place where it undertook missionary activities. Iona sent bishops to where it wanted to establish a missionary church, as when King Oswald of Northumbria asked Iona in 635

(*leachta*) could provide stations from which preaching could take place or prayers might be offered. These were also points at which people might congregate to show respect for individual saints whose relics might be housed in altars (as at St Ninian's Point, Bute), specially marked graves, ornate stone shrines, or portable reliquaries, like the 8th-century house-shaped Monymusk reliquary (77). Relics such as these would have been used publicly in a range of religious rituals; in a time of drought during Adomnán's time at Iona the relics of Columba were taken in a procession to the 'hill of angels'.

Such clergy presumably came to administer to the laity at times of baptism, Communion and death, and perhaps also to preach. Itinerants, they travelled with the tools of their trade: Bible, psalter or prayer book (probably in a leather satchel; 71); crozier (St Moluag's survives at Lismore); handbell; and perhaps a portable altar. Saint's relics were taken around to enforce the law, to 'validate' the collection of tax, or invoke favour from God. These men perhaps travelled between their religious communities and dependent outstations. Such a relationship has been suggested for the island monastery of Eilean Mór and the Keills cross on the nearby mainland (Fisher 2001). We can only speculate as to whether some of the clerics lived with the populace as tenants of the Church rather than in religious communities. There is no direct evidence for their role in baptism, although sites such as Cill Chaitriona (Colonsay) have basins that might have been used for this purpose, and there are of course the holy wells. The role of the Church in burial is also problematic. In Ireland people were buried around churches from at least the 7th century, but this did not become the norm until the 8th or 9th century when burial near the bones of saints became a substitute for burial in pagan cemeteries near the bones of ancestors (O'Brien 2003). When did religious pressure for burial in recognized places begin? In the absence of excavation, it is impossible to confirm whether burial grounds contained women and children, and were therefore used by the laity. The picture is complicated by the Christian reuse of some pagan burial grounds,

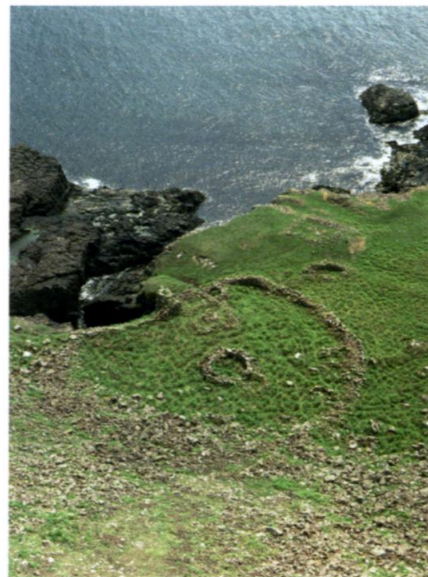


74 Reconstruction of the monastery of Eileach an Naomh, Gavellachs.

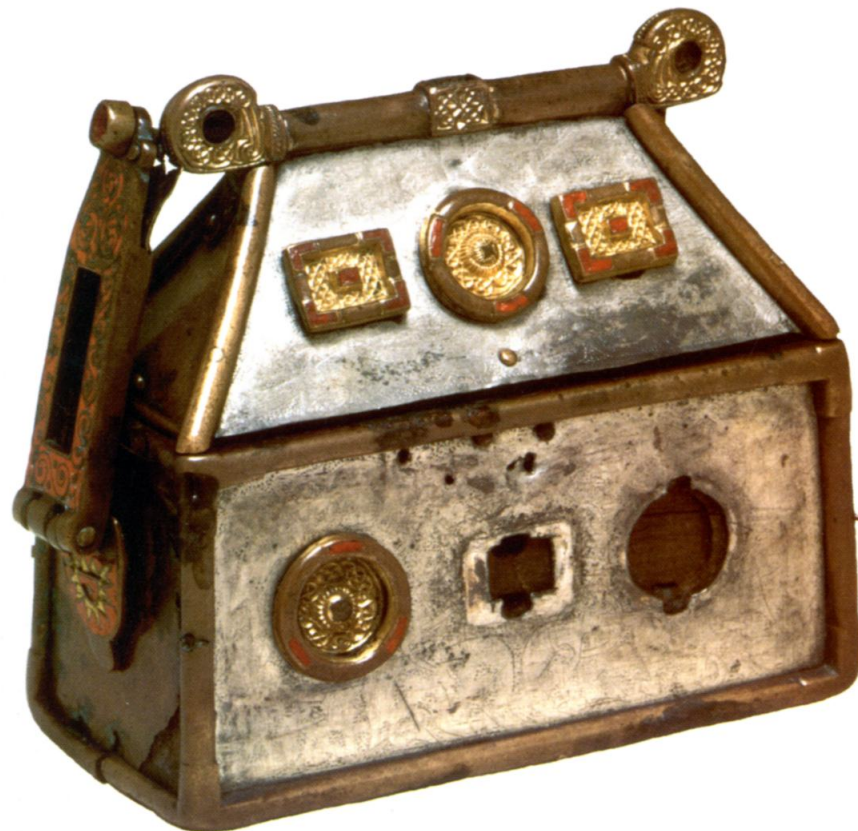


75 Beehive cell at Eileach an Naomh.

76 Sgòr nam Ban-Naomha, Canna. A sophisticated water-supply system may imply that some of the buildings were bath-houses (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).



77 Monymusk reliquary. This small, 8th-century house-shaped shrine is Irish in form, but the ornament incised on its plates is characteristically Pictish (NMS).



although the earlier burials can be distinguished by their different alignments. From an early date kings and nobles, on the other hand, appear to have acquired the right to be buried in or near churches.

Presumably the Church acquired land for its chapels, monasteries, farming and dues by donation and/or in return for prayers. The fate of the monk St Donnán, killed in 617 by Picts on Eigg, however, demonstrates that its presence was not always welcomed.

The role of women in the Church is not known, although place names such as Sgòr nam Ban-Naomha (Crag of the Holy Women) perhaps imply that they did form their own religious communities, as in Ireland.

The Northumbrian church in Pictland

The church in Northumbria that Iona helped to establish (see above) was to have a direct influence on southern Pictland when parts of this became Anglian in the 7th century. In 681 a short-lived bishopric for the Picts was established at Abercorn (presumably on a site of earlier significance). At this time Cuthbert (c.630–87) was active here among the *Niduari* (of Fife?; Kirby 1973). We might reasonably expect some Anglian influence on Pictish sculpture, and vice versa, to date from this period. Taylor (2000) has used place names, including the dedications to St Columba at Inchmahome and Inchcolm, to identify some of the routes that monks and others

appear to have taken between Iona and Lindisfarne in the 7th century, and also to the Atholl area of Pictland (see below and 80).

The Columban Church in Pictland

The extent to which the Columban Church had a significant impact on Pictland before the late 7th century has been over-played (Fraser 2003). We have seen how there were strong native British cults in the south and it is Fraser's thesis that early Columban activity was concentrated in those areas under the control of the king (Bridei son of Mailcon) of the 'tribes of the Tay'. Evidence for this earliest strata of Columban missionary activity may lie in the simple cross-marked pillars and slabs that are to be found along routes joining the eastern and western Highland, perhaps the inspiration for the Pict's invention of symbol-incised stones (Fisher 2001). Comparison of the distribution in Argyll of crosses with expanded terminals (found on a quern at Dunadd and various known early Christian foundations) with the distribution of all other types of crosses demonstrates that this particular form was restricted to areas in which early monks from Iona are known to have been active; hopefully similar successful observations could be made in Pictland.

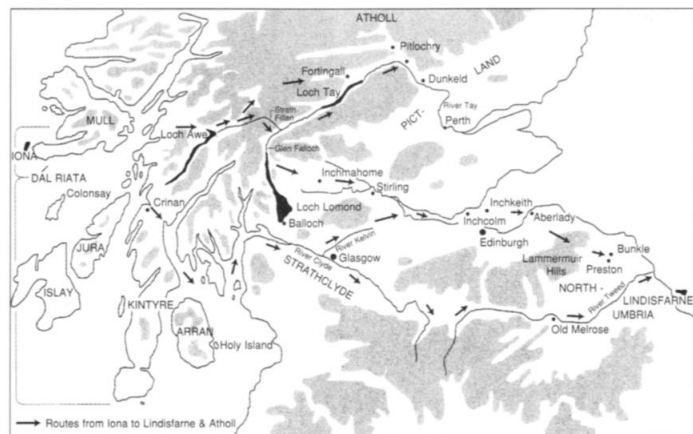
Columba is recorded as seeking a safe journey for one of his monks in the Orkney Islands, and into this picture may fit some of the remote promontory or stack sites in northern Scotland, if indeed these are religious in function (early C-14 dates exist for Brei Holm in Shetland). The extent to which this mission made headway during Columba's



78 A procession of monks on a slab from a composite shrine found at Papil, on Burra, Shetland (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland).

79 Excavations in progress at the Pictish monastery at Portmahomack (Martin Carver).





80 Routes from Iona to Lindisfarne and Atholl.
Drawn by James Renny,
© Simon Taylor/Innes
Review

Establishment of the Pictish Church

There can be little doubt that the Columban Church played a crucial role in the late 7th/early 8th century as the kings of Fortriu actively promoted and established the concept of the single Pictish kingdom (Veitch 1997; Fraser 2003). Adomnán's *Life of Columba* was arguably written to demonstrate and justify what he felt ought be Iona's direct involvement in Pictish religious affairs at this time. After the demise of the Anglian bishopric based at Abercorn (West Lothian), Pictish kings appear to have made Abernethy (Perth and Kinross) their episcopal centre. Its dedication to St Brigit of Kildare suggests strong Gaelic leanings. The available evidence points to Gaelic Columban churchman playing an uncommonly active role in early 8th century Pictish affairs, particularly a cluster of Adomnán and Coeti dedications and a group of *cill*-place names around Logierait, the secular centre of Atholl (which means 'new Ireland' in Gaelic; Taylor 1996; 1999). Coeti was a bishop of Iona who died in 712, and it seems that his responsibilities extended into Atholl. The archaeological evidence supports the importance of this area, not least around Fortingall, where a crop mark suggests that a substantial monastic enclosure (as at Iona and Portmahomack) defined the site of the present church from which a collection of early medieval sculpture has been found; and also Dull, where in 2003 an 8th-century inscribed cross-slab with Ionan parallels was found. The significance of this area is further emphasized by the presence of various cross-incised slabs and a highly unusual concentration of three, if not four, handbells (Robertson 1997). Such handbells, a characteristic feature of the Irish church, are found in iron and bronze, the latter more likely to belong to around 900, although some of the iron examples may be earlier (Bourke 1983).

Taylor (1996) suggests that many of the *cill*-names were being created at this time around Gaelic monastic centres that were under royal patronage, including Kinrithmonth (St Andrews), and were actively promoting Roman usages in accordance with the wishes of King Nechtan. While both the Roman and Columban Churches were part of the

life is a moot point. Bede claimed in 731 that Iona had long ruled over the monasteries of the Picts. Adomnán stated that there were monasteries in Pictland in his time and the inference must be that within about fifty years of Columba's death his followers, and perhaps those of other pioneering missionaries, may have been organizing an infant Church centred on the Moray Firth. The large monastery being excavated by the University of York at Portmahomack on the Tarbat peninsula has the strongest evidence for being one of these early Columban foundations (79).

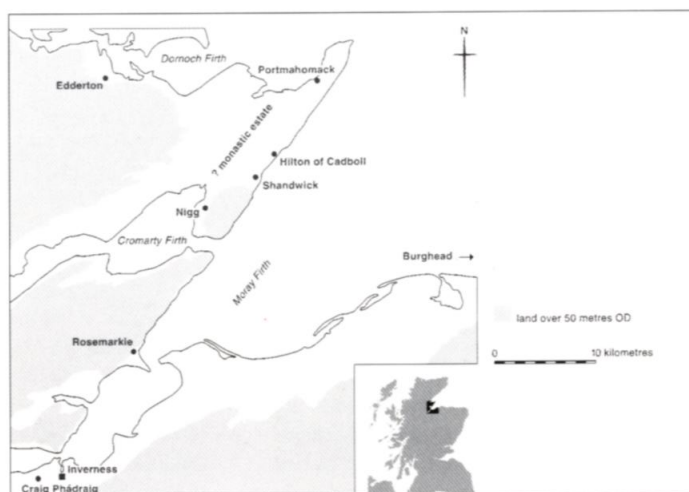
Universal Church, and it is easy to exaggerate any differences between them, the fact is that a dispute had arisen. Ostensibly about the date of Easter and styles of tonsure, this was in reality a power struggle, a fight by the king for jurisdiction over the Church. In Northumbria the matter was resolved in favour of the Roman Church at the Synod of Whitby in 664. Back in Argyll, the monks of Iona were deprived of their influence over the Northumbrian Church, and were reluctant to accept this change. Adomnán was persuaded in 688, but the monks of Iona did not follow until 712; meantime Adomnán and his colleagues were able to promote Roman practices in Pictland and elsewhere.

The actions of Nechtan, as documented by Bede, need to be understood in this context. In around 716 he sent messengers to Abbot Ceolfrith of Monkwearmouth (Northumbria) seeking advice on changing the Pictish Church from Columban to Roman observance, and for architects to build a church in the Roman style (in mortared stone and with arches). On receipt of his instructions, Nechtan enforced the Catholic Easter and 'the reformed nation was glad to be placed under the direction of Peter, the most blessed of the apostles' (Bede, *History* V, 21). His stone church, built at Egglestethir near Restenneth, Angus (exact location unknown), was founded by priests and monks, and seems to have had an extensive jurisdiction in Pictland (81). Since it seems that Roman practices were already being adopted in Pictland, this approach to Northumbria must have been motivated by secular concerns (Veitch 1997). In approaching Northumbria for guidance, he was seeking unity with his southern neighbours at a time of political insecurity. The conscious introduction of this reformed Church throughout his whole kingdom as the Pictish Church was also an effective way of both consolidating and extending royal authority, particularly to any areas that may still have been ripe for conversion. Land was presumably granted to the Church whose clergy, in tandem with the nobility, acted as the king's local agents and representatives. The local nobles derived additional authority by their association with this fashionable new source of power, which also widened their career opportunities. Its pastoral system was a means of extending and establishing an ideology that was pro-state. The Church was also able to assist in administrative matters (see below). This type of symbiosis between king and Church was a recognized phenomenon throughout north-west Europe in the 8th century. In return, the Church obtained the land (and associated rights) that it needed both to survive and to generate wealth for its own works. Ecclesiastics were in effect ideologically endowed nobility who derived their authority from their access to Christianity.

It perhaps seem odd then that in 717 the 'familia of Iona' should have been expelled by Nechtan from Pictland. Historians debate what might be meant by

81 North face of a small Anglo-Saxon church at Escomb, County Durham. King Nechtan's church at Egglestethir is likely to have been similar: long rectangular nave connected to small square chancel by tall narrow arch; high, small windows; little or no ornament; and set within a circular burial ground (B T Batsford).





82 The distribution of early historic sites in and around the Tarbat peninsula, showing the concentration of important ecclesiastical sites in this area. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved Historic Scotland Licence No. 100017509 2004.

83 Excavations in 2001 at Hilton of Cadboll led to the discovery of the famous cross-slab's missing lower portion. See also (45).



this development, but there is much to commend the idea that it was to do with dismantling the Ionan ascendancy in Pictland, rather than the involvement of the Columban Church as such (Fraser 2003). Nechtan's approach to Northumbria may have been a part of the build-up to this as he established alternative mechanisms for the Church and state to interrelate.

Nechtán's reforms were seemingly very effective and extended as far as the Northern Isles. As symbol-incised stones indicate, Orkney was already part of the Pictish orbit in the 7th century, but the establishment of the Roman Church marks its short-lived absorption into the Pictish kingdom and perhaps the extension of authority to Shetland. There

are legends of a person called St Boniface building 150 churches in Pictland. Clearly this was not the better-known Devonian saint of the same name who led a famous mission to central Germany in 718–23. Scottish traditions of a Boniface and a Curetan apparently refer to the same person. It appears that Curetan was instrumental in the introduction of the Roman Church to the north and subsequently changed his name to Boniface to mark allegiance to Roman practices. Veitch (1997) suggests that while Curetan was responsible for the mission in northern Pictland, Adomnán fulfilled a similar role in the south.

An even geographical distribution of definite and possible dedications to St Peter in Orkney can be identified and may date to this period. Each is referred to as a kirk rather than a chapel, is grander than might have been expected, and is sited on the top of broch mounds – high-status prehistoric sites likely to have been gifted by secular rulers (Lamb

1993; but see Barrett 2003). According to legend, St Tredwell, a holy virgin, accompanied Boniface on his mission to the Picts. Dedications to both of them on Papa Westray suggest that a Northern Isles bishopric may have been intended for here, at a central location. Boniface is also credited with building a church at Rosemarkie (Highland), from where his Orcadian mission may have been monitored. The large collection of sculpture from Rosemarkie (including a significant quantity that is 'architectural' in form) and other sites on the adjacent Tarbat peninsula (Shandwick, Portmahomack, Hilton of Cadboll and

Nigg) testifies to the presence of a vigorous and wealthy Church (82, 83, front cover).

There seems little doubt that a part of the implementation of Nechtan's agenda, and a measure of its success, was the programme of erecting symbol-bearing cross-slabs, which are found throughout much of Pictland (84). The greatest preponderance of these lies south of the Mounth and north of Fife, perhaps because the major endowments were in the largely subject areas rather than the tribal homeland of the dominant group of Picts (Woolf 2001a). Either way, the suggestion must be that the local aristocracy gave the Church its fullest support in this area; Carver (1998; 2001) feels this evidence is suggestive of a secular, as opposed to episcopal or monastic church in these areas, closely tied to the network of small local lordships. Most of these and the subsequent Christian carvings without Pictish symbols are found at or nearby the sites of later medieval parish churches or burial grounds, suggesting that these were centres of Christian worship and/or burial from the 8th century, if not before (86). The symbol-bearing cross-slabs were not used to mark individual burials, but were public statements about the beliefs of the wider community and the taste and sophistication of their patrons. We might expect to find them near the *caput* of a thanage or perhaps sited along important routeways. If they were associated with churches, these are likely to have been mostly of timber; the alternative patronage of stone churches is more likely to have been a 9th century and later development (Driscoll 1998b).

Many of these cross-slabs were probably erected in the years following Nechtan's approach to Northumbria. Their form and the adoption of interlace decorative elements are an imaginative and

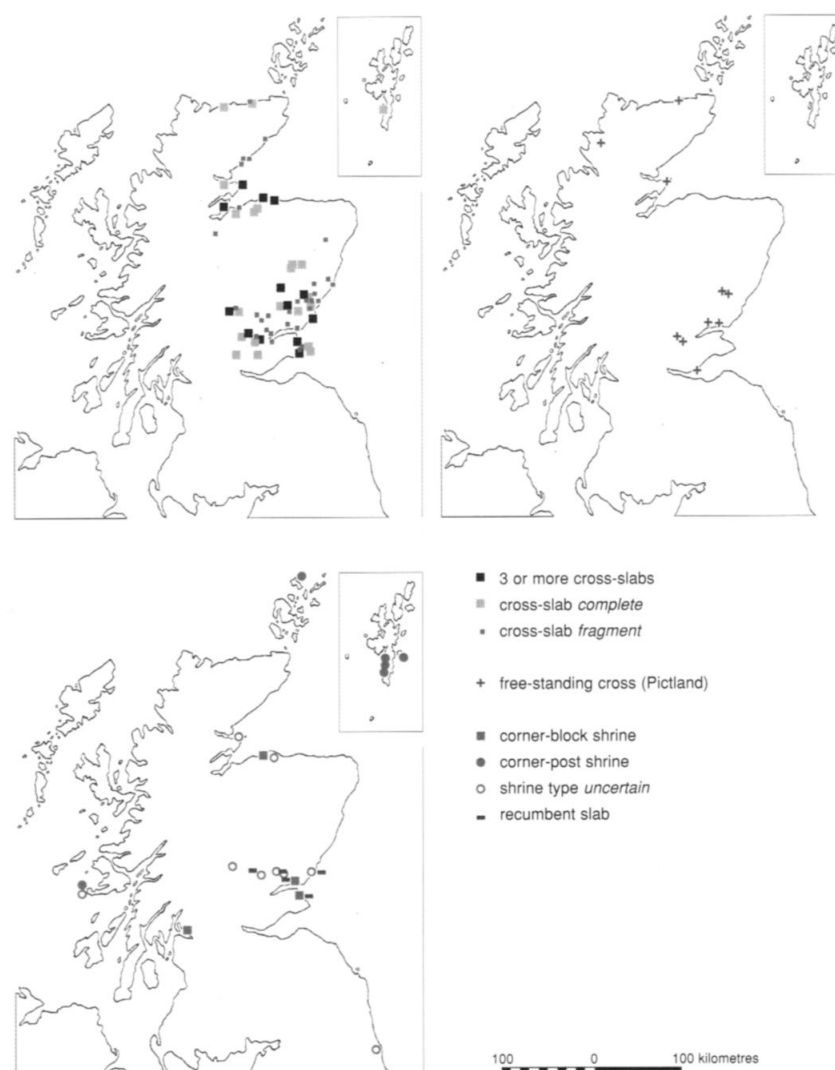


84 The cross-slab at Aberlemno roadside is a splendid testimony to the close relationship between the (hunting) Pictish nobility and the church.



85 Front face of the cross-slab at Aberlemno churchyard.

86 Distribution of select types of non-symbol-bearing early historic sculpted stones. Cross-slab fragments may have formed part of monuments that did originally include symbols. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved Historic Scotland Licence No. 100017509 2004.



distinctive response by Pictish masons to the artistic and technical inspiration of their Northumbrian counterparts, a legacy of the close relationship between the two kingdoms (85). More importantly, their content encapsulates the changing political and ecclesiastical scene. On one side of them can be found a magnificent cross, glorifying God. The reverse is usually reserved for images of the secular patrons (usually male), whose status is reinforced by their depiction in the noble pursuits of hunting and riding. Only on the

stone from Hilton of Cadboll do we find an image of a female patron depicted in the familiar hunting scene (in this instance accompanied by trumpeters; see 45). Many of these images had both secular and religious meaning. Hunting scenes might allude to the Christian soul in pursuit of Christ (the deer) and salvation. Other images were more explicit references to Bible stories, although some mythological themes might also have been appropriated for Christian purposes. These are juxtaposed with revamped Pictish designs.

While we cannot know what we are missing by way of timber architecture and sculpture, it seems likely that few who visited the places where these monuments were erected could have failed to be impressed by their beauty, magnificence and technical accomplishment. During the months in which they were manufactured and the years in which they stood in the landscape, through their sheer presence as well as their detailed symbolism they conveyed significant messages about the relationship of the local nobility to the church. The high investment involved in their creation is a reflection of the big ideas that lay behind them (Carver 1998). As the person 'on the ground', the itinerant sculptor (perhaps a monk) would have played an important role in communicating to the local population why the stone was being erected and what its symbolism meant. On the one hand these monuments were testimonies to the rights of the Church to the land and confirmation of its jurisdiction, but they also evoked the status and ritual authority of the secular patrons who perhaps had a distinctively Pictish proprietorial relationship to the Church (see p. 91). If Nechtan was promoting a specifically Pictish church, the use of the unique Pictish symbols, whether a language or not, would have conveyed additional significance to this active political and ecclesiastical campaign.

Nowhere in Argyll do we find such blatant evidence for the association of the Church with its secular peers, as the distinctive sculpture of the two areas makes clear. Images of clerics are also fairly common on Pictish sculpture (71, 78) as opposed to that of the Dál Riata. There was clearly an increasing involvement between the Pictish Church and lay people, as can be seen in the foundation of religious houses, often in close proximity to the secular power centres. Some of these developed into major ecclesiastical centres, to judge from the large collections of carvings that have been found. At Meigle in Perth and Kinross, architectural fragments also suggest a stone structure of some kind, although not necessarily a church (87). By the later 8th and 9th centuries new types of burial monuments developed (such as recumbent slabs), demonstrating that the Church had firmly established its role with regard to the burial of the nobility, if not other laity. The enthusiasm and initiative that kings and nobles took in establishing these religious foundations suggest that the Church also fulfilled a supplementary role to secular administration, not least through its access to the technology of writing.

87 Collection of sculpted stones at Meigle, as displayed in 1953. Includes recumbent grave markers, some with slots for uprights or perhaps relics (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).



The non-Columban church in Pictland

But for all Nechtan's enthusiasm for the Columban Church, the presence and strength of lesser documented non-Columban establishments must not be lost sight of, in addition to the long-lived legacy of the native cults. The latter may explain the relative lack of symbol-bearing cross-slabs and other forms of Pictish sculpture in Fife (Taylor 1996). Other churches with non-Columban associations nonetheless demonstrate evidence for Irish influence through, for instance, their sculpture. A good example are the fragments of large free-standing crosses that are to be found at St Vigean and Edzell in Angus.

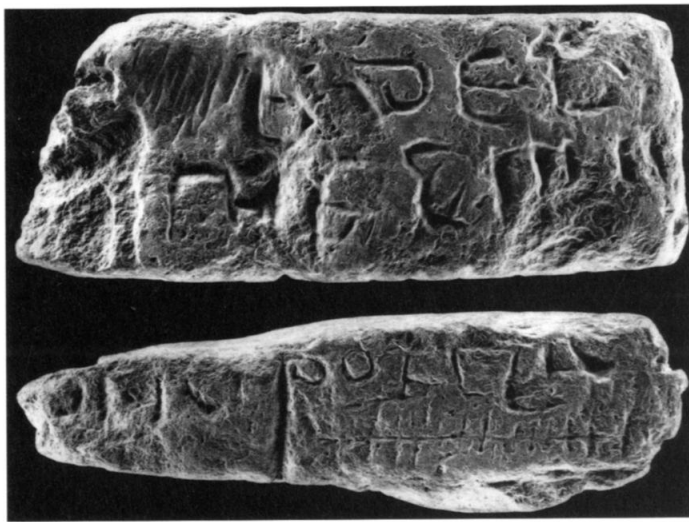
The use of writing

We have already examined the probable reasons for the lack of surviving early historic written sources in Pictland (chapter 2), but how prevalent was literacy, and how and when was it used? Direct evidence is limited but the Picts were probably as literate as their peers in Argyll and beyond (Forsyth 1998).

Literacy was promoted by the Church: in Ireland Patrick issued his monks and new converts with the rudiments of knowledge, which may have included alphabets. Alphabet stones, known from both Ireland and Scotland (88), may have been teaching aids but are more likely to have been symbolic statements about access to literacy and the Word of God. The ability to read and write, and/or access to someone who could do this, was the passport to enlightenment. Leading members of the Church, such as Adomnán and Columba, were clearly well-travelled, highly educated, literate people, conversant with current ideology and intellectual trends in north-western Europe (the impressive library of Iona even contained books on Near Eastern topography). The complex iconography of ecclesiastical art confirms that neither the Columban nor Roman Church was in any way

intellectually handicapped and Ceolfrith's letter to Nechtan provides our best evidence that the Pictish aristocracy were a match for this. Adomnán took his own notes on wax tablets, which he or his fellow monks could copy onto vellum in the scriptorium. We should note how a known literate community such as Iona opted to produce only a small number of stone inscriptions. Other monasteries too had the capacity to produce ornate, illuminated texts; surviving metalwork and stone-carving of this period imply an active and widespread manuscript tradition. The rare survival of a carved Latin text from Portmahomack (6) implies that this monastery had the capacity to produce books in an accomplished Insular script; archaeological excavations have also

88 Lochgoilhead: stone with sequences of letters in alphabetical order (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).



produced evidence for vellum manufacture on the site, a highly resource-intensive activity. Foreign models in the form of manuscripts and perhaps textiles must have been widely circulated, to judge from the Northumbrian, Continental and Byzantine influences that are prevalent in the artwork (23). Discovery in 2002 of inscribed slates likely to be of 8th-century date from Inchmarnock provide invaluable evidence for literacy and the teaching of writing even on an apparently minor site.

Being literate gave people the ability to accumulate knowledge about the past and the natural world, to store texts through time and to transmit them over greater distances, while social relations could be extended beyond face-to-face interaction. In the case of the Church, therefore, writing allowed it the capacity to authorize new religious beliefs while fulfilling and developing its own intellectual and religious needs. It did so through study of the Scriptures and other holy writings, use of texts in its religious observance, compilation and circulation of saints' *Lives*, erection of dedications and memorials, and the creation of laws.

King Alfred of Wessex tried to make his subjects more literate so that they could familiarize themselves with the Word of God, but literacy remained virtually a clerical monopoly in Saxon England too. Kings and nobles were probably the only lay people who acquired writing and reading skills; Northumbrian kings trained at Iona, and it is possible that, as in Ireland, Pictish and Dál Riata nobles also received some schooling. More mundane objects with ogham suggest that some of the laity embraced this as a means of writing in their own language (what Forsyth 1998 terms the 'democratization' of literacy), perhaps in advance of conversion to Christianity. The presence of yellow manuscript pigment and a stone disc with a Christian inscription at Dunadd supports there being literate people at power centres, but the majority of writing probably took place at monastic scriptoria, which were often located nearby.

The question then is, to what extent did kings need and opt to use writing, particularly in government? The first physical evidence of a king exploiting the power of the written word is on the early-9th-century Dupplin Cross. Nechtan made good use of it: he sought advice from Bishop Ceolfrith of Northumbria about the Roman Church and sent new Easter cycles 'throughout all the Provinces of the Picts to be transcribed, learned and observed' (Bede, *History* V, 21). Nechtan, and certainly his more learned men, would have understood Latin. We have no proof that he also corresponded with his secular followers, or indeed they with him, but it seems unavoidable given the increasing distances over which he and his successors needed to operate. In addition, we might also anticipate that there was a greater reliance on written 'rules' or laws but, whether or not these were ever committed to vellum, it would still have been their verbal oration that gave them the force of law.

The later Church

Throughout north-western Europe the idea of the reborn Christian Roman empire became popular after c. 750 – as suggested by the series of Pictish and Scottish kings called Constantine (Constantine) – and the developing relationship between the Church and state in Pictland can be seen in the flowering of officially sponsored ecclesiastical art. The finest example of this, the St Andrews Sarcophagus, was probably first erected within a royal chapel or monastic church, where it possibly commemorated Onuist son of Uurguist (died 761) (4, 23).



89 Dupplin Cross: the first two and a half lines of the inscription, in the panel beneath the cross-head on the left, read CU [...] NTIN / FILIUS FIRCU / S (Forsyth 1995b) (drawn by Ian G Scott, Crown Copyright: Historic Scotland).

Pictish designs are not found on 8th-century silver metalwork, and during the second half of the 8th/early 9th century they also ceased to be used on sculpture, whether on dressed slabs or later free-standing crosses (a new form of monument found also in Argyll and elsewhere). The content of sculptures also changed: instead of hunting scenes, the secular authorities tended to be depicted in a militaristic stance, as on the 9th-century Dupplin Cross, suggesting a strengthening and formalization of royal authority through means that included military might. Erected only a few miles away from the royal palace of Forteviot, on the opposite bank of the River Earn, the cross shows a king on horseback (89), possibly identified from a worn inscription as Constantin son of Uurgust (c. 789–820). Beneath and around him are several ranks of foot-soldiers: men with moustaches and ornamented hems on their tunics, and younger men with neither. A cross of similar form but unknown imagery originally overlooked Forteviot from Invermay, on the opposite side of the strath. The absence of Pictish symbols can be attributed to many factors, not least the expanded and diversified range of contexts in which sculptural monuments might be deployed. Put simply, there were certain contexts in which the Picts considered these symbols not to be relevant, particularly, so it seems, when associated with monastic houses, royal establishments, and church furnishings and architecture. Whether representing the Pictish language or not, their explicit Pictishness would also have run counter to the increasingly Gaelic interests of the kings. It is relevant that the very form of the Dupplin Cross itself is suggested to have come from a Columban, i.e. Gaelic, milieu (Henderson 1999).

Constantin son of Uurgust is sometimes credited with the foundation of a major new ecclesiastical foundation at Dunkeld, but it was Cinaed mac Ailpín in 849 who saw this to fruition and affirmed its status by bringing to it some of the relics of St Columba (Bannerman 1997). Iona had suffered a string of Viking raids and as a result of this established a sister house at Kells in County Meath in 807. Its position and prestige as head of the Columban confederacy of churches on either side of the North Channel only began to waver significantly in the mid-9th century, as marked, if not exacerbated by, the division of Columba's relics between Dunkeld and Kells in 849 and the fact that from the late 9th century onwards the seat of the head of the Columban Church moved to Ireland (Herbert 1996). That the relics were kept at Iona for much of the period up to 849 reinforces its continuing significance, an importance that Norse settlers ultimately respected too (Clancy 1996; Jennings 1998). It is an indication of Cinaed's authority that he was able to acquire some of these prestigious, venerated objects for Dunkeld (90). We can but imagine the spectacle of popular devotion that would have accompanied their formal translation.

Into this picture steps the 8th/9th-century *céli Dé* ("Servants of God") monastic reform movement with strong southern Irish connections. Dedicated to the renewal of the coenobitic (communal) lifestyle for monks, it promoted an episcopal church structure with clear pastoral duties. Iona (in particular its abbot Diarmait, 814–sometime after 831) is likely to have played a significant role in promoting this influential style of church in Pictland, as for instance at St Andrews. Dunkeld may even have been an early 9th-century *céli Dé* foundation. A reference in the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* can be interpreted as suggesting that king Giric (878–89) was responsible for the legal clarification of the relationship of the Church and state in line with the expectations of this Irish reform movement, particularly removing the role that Pictish potentates apparently had in the running of individual church establishments (Clancy 1996). This is perhaps another reason why Pictish symbols might disappear from ecclesiastical sculpture.

In this chapter we have seen how the influence of the Church came to permeate all levels of society and was probably the most successful and effective method by which the authority of kings could be peacefully extended. It did so by extolling an international and outward-looking belief system as part of a Universal Church, reinforcing and sustaining the breakdown of locally based power structures that were highly individual and personal in their character. Its ideology was pro-state and hence supported the aspirations of kings who now modelled themselves upon leaders of the former Christian Roman empire and sought to expand and centralize their power-base. With time, the Church also came to provide some degree of administrative support for the king and nobility. Through the history of the Church and its interrelationship with the rest of society we can therefore trace evidence for the consolidation of society. But before discussing when this effectively took place, we must turn to examine the fourth source of power – military might.



90 Crieff mounts: later reused as horse furniture, these could have been from a decorated altar, reliquary or cross, and were perhaps part of a relic brought from Iona by Cinaed mac Ailpín (NMS).

From 'wandering thieves' to lords of war

Men went to Catraeth in force, in full cry,
Swift steeds and dark-blue war-gear and shields,
Spear-shafts held high and spear-points sharp-edged,
And glittering mail-coats and swords

(*Gododdin*, verse 33)

Not only is the early historic period throughout the British Isles characterized by warlike, heroic kings who ruled over defined and ever-larger territories, but we can also detect certain changes in the nature and circumstances of combat. This changing face of military aggression encapsulates many of the political, social and religious developments of the period, most of which have already been referred to in the preceding chapters.

Warfare was a major and regular component of early historic life. Heroic literature, such as the *Gododdin*, paints a picture of an aggressive society in which petty kings and their personal warrior retinues were 'nurtured on wine and mead' and fought to obtain personal glory and material wealth. Contemporary poetry was used to reinforce heroic concepts of behaviour. Many of their campaigns, which followed a ritualistic formula, may simply have been to plunder or exact tribute, rather than being in pursuance or defence of territorial ambitions. Acquisition of slaves may have been an additional motive. Slave-trading was common in the Roman period, if not before: Patrick (later a saint) is the best-known victim, kidnapped from western Britain and taken to Ireland. Northern British kings also enslaved some of those they conquered. There was a Dál Riata slave-girl at the Pictish court of Bridei son of Mailcon when Columba visited it. Regardless of the purpose, fighting generally took place between leaders of different territories, such as kindreds of Dál Riata, or between the different peoples of north Britain. Gildas, admittedly a biased observer, described both the Picts and Dál Riata in the 6th century as 'wandering thieves who had no taste for war' and 'in perfect accord in their greed for bloodshed'. But from the annals we can begin to piece together a different picture in which kings sought to both extend and formalize the extent of their territories. Aedán mac Gabráin is a classic example of a warlord. Overlord of Dál Riata from 574, by land and sea he successfully campaigned against Pictland for many years (as far north as Orkney) and against the Angles, until in 603 he was defeated at *Degsastan*, somewhere in Northumbria. Clearly sea-routes, waterways and Roman roads were commonly employed to transport large forces over considerable distances. At the height of their powers the Pictish authorities must have been able to call on significant nautical abilities to retain their authority, but these proved to be no match for the superior nautical technology of the Vikings (Lamb 1993).

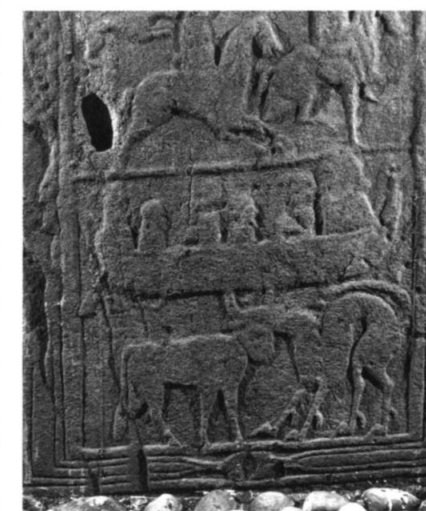
The inheritance of kingdoms was usually hotly contested by rival kin groups, which, due to intermarriage, might also include eligible foreigners. Power centres had a defensive

capacity (chapter 3) and were targeted for siege, capture and burning, and the terse accounts of these events – for example, '683 Siege of Dundurn' – may be scribal shorthand for shifts in the distribution of authority and peoples associated with these power centres. Certainly, it is hard to imagine that monks would have recorded anything less significant, unless it was simply to catalogue the iniquities of their secular contemporaries for their own, sanctimonious, purposes. However, most combat is likely to have taken place away from the power centres, where the space was available for set-piece battles, whether at sea or on land, both of which are documented.

Battles at sea

Both the Picts and Dál Riata were known to the Romans as sea-raiders, and they clearly continued to use the seaways for communication, trade and attack. Vegetius, a 4th-century Roman writer, describes camouflaged scout-boats – with sails, ropes and 20 rowers – which have sometimes been attributed to the Picts, although the evidence is slender. The earliest specific reference to a sea-battle in the British Isles refers to a battle between the Cenél Loairn and Cenél nGabráin in 719. Yet as early as the 580s Aedán mac Gabráin was already campaigning in Orkney and the Isle of Man. Both the Picts and Dál Riata could clearly muster large navies: 150 Pictish ships were wrecked in 729 and Burghead is a strong contender for a naval base. Seafaring was therefore both a normal and an essential component of life, as testified by Adomnán's reference to at least 55 separate journeys in his account of Columba's life. We are also frequently reminded of the perils of the sea: 'Failbe ... the successor of Maelrubai of Applecross, was drowned in the deep sea with his sailors, twenty-two in number'. The Dál Riata would also have been familiar with merchant ships from southern Britain, Gaul, and perhaps the Mediterranean, which were bringing imported goods to their shores. The use of and familiarity with boats can be easily under-estimated because no ships survive. Yet the few documentary sources, in tandem with wider evidence for the long-distance contacts that people clearly had at this time, suggests that travel over considerable distances, and presumably in well-constructed ships, was fairly commonplace.

On the basis of Adomnán's descriptions, some of the Dál Riata ships could be large (carrying more than 20 people) and, while all used oars, the largest could also be fitted with a mast and sail. As to the construction of the boats, the monks of Iona acquired pine and oak for a *longa navis* ('long ship'). We do not know if any boats were made exclusively of timber, but this seems likely to have been the case. Skin-covered currachs, a form of



91 Detail of St Orland's Stone, Cossans. © Tom Gray. Tom and Sybil Gray Collection

construction which, by then, already had a pedigree in Ireland of about 4,000 years, were undoubtedly common.

Far less is known about Pictish boats. In general these too may have been skin-covered, although the double-ended, mastless rowing-boat illustrated on the St Orland's cross-slab may have been wooden (91), as may have been the boat carved on the cave wall at Jonathan's Cave, East Wemyss. Competent sketches of boats, including masted examples, are also found on various stones from Jarlshof, Shetland, possibly also Burness, Orkney (Johnstone 1988; O'Meadhra 1993; Ritchie 1997). For travel in inland waters, the occasional early historic log-boat has also been recognized. In contemporary Ireland there is evidence for the heightening of such dug-outs by the addition of timber strakes.

Battles on land

When it comes to the nature of fighting on land, we know almost as little. There are no detailed accounts to match that provided by Tacitus of Agricola's victory over the Britons at Mons Graupius in 83. Here the allied forces of the British tribes included chariots and foot-soldiers (who fought with huge swords for slashing and carried small shields). The *Gododdin* gives little away about early historic battle tactics or weapon-handling and few weapons themselves survive (unlike in neighbouring Bernicia, where pagan warriors were buried with them). Fraser (2002) has vividly reconstructed within the limits of available evidence the finer details of the battle of Dunnichen, in a historical, political and physical sense. Few weapons survive, although there is a notable collection from Dunadd, and manufacturing evidence for knobbed spearbutts is now assigned to the mid-1st millennium (Heald 2001). The sculpted stones provide greater detail, with their depictions of spears, axes, decorated shields (both square and round) and swords (92; see 19). Crossbows, as shown on a number of sculptures, were probably only used in hunting. The St Ninian's Isle chapes and sword pommel and the evidence from Norrie's Law for silver-mounted ceremonial weapons demonstrate just how richly embellished such objects might be. The association of kings with such high-status objects is reinforced by the imagery of kings on the St Andrews Sarcophagus (23), the imposing mounted warrior on the Dupplin Cross with his possible sceptre (89), and on the Forteviot arch (33) where Joanna Close-Brooks suggests that the main figure may be holding a sword across his knees. The last reference to the use of chariots was in the early 3rd century, but carefully bred horses are likely to have been an essential component of warfare: for transport to and from battle, for the military posturing that undoubtedly preceded action, and for battle itself. The majority of soldiers probably fought on foot, with battle on horseback limited to kings and nobles, as illustrated on the carvings on the cross-slab at Aberlemno churchyard, Angus (21). On the reverse of this cross-slab is a battle scene, interpreted as a cartoon-style account of the battle of Dunnichen, which took place about 10 km (6 mi) away in 685. The original location of this sculpture is not known but it was surely erected under royal stimulus (perhaps Onuist son of Uurguist) to make a political statement about Pictish royal authority. It unites Christian piety with the recital of royal history (Barrett 1990), a history that revels in both the hierarchical nature of society and royal achievements (political and religious) obtained by military or other means.

The aim of much of this aggression was first to acquire a given area, and then to assert authority, perhaps extending it to neighbouring territories. In pursuit of this ambition, highly mobile armies and navies covered considerable distances. The loyalty and/or submission of the pacified local leaders was paramount, by their deaths if need be. If not on the battlefield, this might take the form of drowning, a ritual practice first attested in Gaul. The Pictish kings are recorded drowning enemy leaders in 734 and 739. Decapitation may also have been practised, as depicted on Sueno's Stone (Moray) (93).

To ensure that these redefined political relationships were maintained and upheld by the regular submission of tribute, high-status hostages were often taken by the victors and presumably detained at power centres. It was also traditional for kings to marry the sisters and daughters of other kings and to transfer the upbringing of their children to foster-parents in different lineages, the intention being that concerns about the safety of their children would deter aggression, although this ploy did not always succeed.

One of the key points to note is how such shifts in authority revolved around the personal ambitions of key individuals – the kings and territorial lords – and how unstable and short-lived any political liaisons might actually be. No matter how a king died – whether violently or in his bed – there was always enormous competition among rivals to be his successor.

Organization for war

We have yet to consider the contribution that military might made to the extension and consolidation of Argyll, Pictland, and their political union. Clearly the ultimate success of any one individual or group was not simply the incremental product of *ad hoc* military ventures. On the contrary, in both Argyll and Pictland we find evidence that kings were placing an increasing emphasis on organizing themselves for war. There was a shift from plundering, pillaging and extortion to pitched battles, which required far greater military organization and resources. For example, enormous efforts went into the breeding and stabling of horses, and the groom seen accompanying the female figure on the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab (45) must have been an important member of the royal household. Indeed, as sculptures testify, society was increasingly hierarchical, and specialized posts were undoubtedly a natural consequence of this. Further resources must also have been required to free warriors for either permanent or temporary duty. The kings were presumably able



92 Cross-slab from Benzie. © Tom Gray. Tom and Sybil Gray Collection

93 Sueno's Stone, back face. Was this erected to mark Cinaed mac Ailpín's achievement in taking over north and south Pictland?



to do this because sophisticated mechanisms existed for the exploitation of the agricultural produce of the land (chapter 4).

It is an open question what mechanisms existed for the mustering of army and navy. The *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* includes a civil survey and military assessment, together forming an account of how much tribute an over-king could expect from part of Argyll – namely, the number of households and number of men and ships each household should provide for military expeditions. Dumville (2002) does 'not believe a single word which has been written in interpretation of it' including the view that it provides evidence for administrative sophistication in this part of early historic Scotland (see p. 17) and historians and archaeologists have yet to pick up the pieces of his analysis. By analogy from elsewhere, we can only assume that local lords, if not individual households, would have had some sort of obligation to provide kings with equipped soldiers and sailors in times of need, while others may have been required to submit agricultural produce.

By the late 8th century there had also been a change in the perception of how kings viewed themselves, including their military role. This transformation relates largely to the influence of the Church, which was behind a school of thought that wanted to change the character and succession practices of kingship. It wished to create a more peaceful society in which a king was inviolate, ruled peacefully, and where there was an orderly and legitimate form of succession upon his death, rather than bloodshed and feud. This school of thought, championed by Adomnán among others, was pervasive and influential throughout Europe; in Pictland and Argyll it can be seen in the King David iconography in the sculpture (see 4, 23, 72, 89). The content of the sculpture also changed (chapter 5): instead of hunting scenes, the secular authorities tended to be depicted in a militaristic stance, as on Dupplin Cross or Sueno's Stone. The new imagery suggests new uses for sculpture and a strengthening and formalization of royal authority. Few images of warriors (as opposed to hunters) are found on earlier sculpture, yet the images on Dupplin Cross can be interpreted as evidence for an increasingly professional, perhaps full-time, retinue of soldiers. As elsewhere in contemporary Europe, sons were perhaps being placed in the care of their patrons.

Military aggression can therefore be seen as a continual undercurrent throughout the period. It could be – indeed frequently was – used to decide which particular person inherited or acquired authority over any given area; kings had to be strong. This was presumably how Bridei son of Beli consolidated the Pictish kingship and we must also assume that this was how Cinaed mac Ailpín rose to power. Similarly, we know that when Cinaed met with local resistance to his takeover, he tackled the problem by military means. So military might was also used to obtain and assert power. Such instances of internecine strife and apparent political instability are recurrent themes throughout this period.

But kings now needed more than material wealth, personal charisma and military might to stay in effective control of such large areas. They needed the support of the Church. Christianity had led to changes in the character of kingship that go some way to explaining how more permanent structures of government came into place. With the advent of Christianity, kingship was redefined. In theory the Church now interceded on behalf of a king and his people, and clerics began to play a role in inauguration (chapter 3). They also tried to influence how future kings were chosen – in order to ensure a stable

society – and were pro-state in their ideology (chapter 5). The Church acknowledged that it could not stop kings fighting, but it could encourage a king to be 'strong like David in crushing his enemies yet lowly in the sight of God' (Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*). The biblical image of David, the powerful yet holy warrior-king, was exploited throughout contemporary Europe; Carolingian court poets flattered Emperor Charlemagne by allusions to David. We find tangible acknowledgement of this attitude in Christian invocations inscribed on weapons, such as on one of the St Ninian's Isle sword chapes (94), and in the content of sculpture, where battle imagery is used to transmit messages of salvation and redemption.

Warrior saints

Although the Church largely decried violence, some saints, Columba in particular, developed a cult status associated with their power as victory givers (Clancy 1997). In other words, they fulfilled the role of earlier pagan warlike deities. Columba came from the warrior aristocracy and patently had an abiding personal interest in battles; he may even have left Ireland in penitence for his involvement in the warfare that, among other things, had left him with a 'livid scar' on his side. Despite this, he did not eschew violence when it could be used in the cause of justice, and indeed encouraged it: a penitent was given a sword with which to settle an unjust score before returning to fulfil his life as a monk. Within 50 years of his death, calling on the patronage of Columba was thought to secure military victory, and relics associated with him later became employed as talismans in battle. His prayer book, the *Cathach* or 'Battler', was enshrined and used in Ireland by the O'Donnells to secure victory in battle, while his crozier and a house-shaped reliquary were put to similar effect in Scotland (the latter is thought by some to be the artefact now known as the Monymusk reliquary, but there are grounds to doubt this: Caldwell 2001). In later times the Gaelic-Norse inhabitants of western Scotland were to see him as their protector, attributing to him some of the qualities of the Viking war-god, Odin.

It is difficult to assess the contribution of military aggression to the development and consolidation of Pictland, or to its takeover by Dál Riata kings. Clearly conflict was a major component of early historic society, but this alone cannot account for the political, social, economic and ideological developments of the times. Yet from out of this Alba was born. The final chapter draws together these strands of evidence to suggest how the Pictish and Dál Riata nations became a political unity.

94 Inscribed sword chape from St Ninian's Isle. One interpretation is that it reads (upside down) 'Property of the son of the holy spirit' and on the opposite side 'In the name of God' (NMS).



Alba: the emergence of the Scottish nation

It is a remarkable achievement that such a geographically extended and diverse group of peoples as the Picts could have been identified as a grouping since the late Roman period. Equally extraordinary is the fact that this relationship should have survived the withdrawal of the Romans – the external threat that had first impelled the Iron Age tribes of Scotland to bond in adversity against a common enemy. Over the centuries, as generations of petty warrior kings struggled to obtain, maintain and extend their personal authority, this loose confederation of Pictish peoples began to consolidate, a process to which their neighbours made a significant contribution. Regrettably, very little is known of the probably considerable involvement of the British kingdom of Strathclyde, but the intimate role of Argyll is slightly better charted, as is the more short-lived direct involvement of Northumbria. Before considering the issue of consolidation between the Picts and Dál Riata, we must first examine the extent to which the Pictish peoples had already laid its foundations.

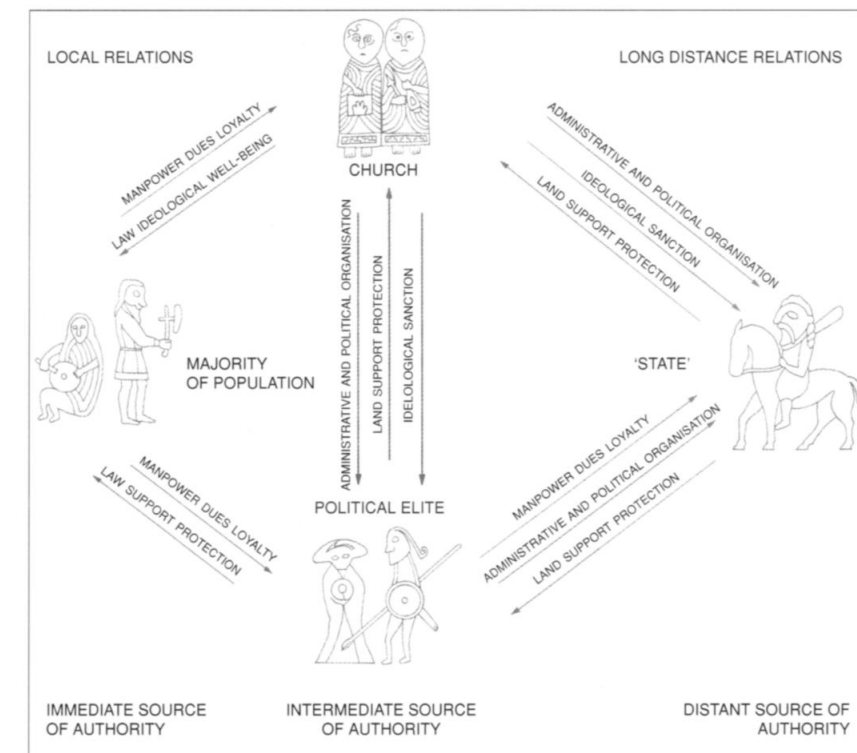
The consolidation of power

Consolidation of power took place as the nature of kingship evolved through time. In previous chapters we have explored the various strategies that early historic leaders could use to create, extend and maintain their authority: overlapping, closely intermeshed strands of military, economic, political and ideological power. The power of kings was highly personalized and informal, resulting in hotly contested competition for the inheritance of territories, the victor usually being the person with the greatest and strongest military backing. But once in power, further means were needed to persuade people to acquiesce in new distributions of authority. How, where and when did the process of consolidation of Pictish power take place?

How?

In order to consolidate power, the Pictish overkings would have needed to strengthen their authority effectively throughout the expanse of Pictland. A model can be suggested for how the four major components of this society – the state/highest authorities, Church, political élite, and majority of the population – interrelated (95). In general terms, this model is equally applicable to Alba.

In this model, leaders extended the distance over which their authority could operate by obtaining the support of the Church and political élite (the *morraer*, thanes and their predecessors), who effectively acted as their agents in areas beyond those in which the king could effectively operate himself. In return for the king granting them land, support and



95 Suggested model for the relationship between resources and the structuring of social authority over time and space.

protection, or acknowledging their inherited rights to this, the élite gave the king their political, military and economic support, however nominal this might be in practice. This network of royal officials or nobles giving allegiance to the king was essential. Power flowed into their hands (and up to the king) by means of a highly structured and organized landscape of agricultural exploitation. Power bases, which leaders used both to protect themselves and to demonstrate their status and authority, were primarily bases for the collection, transformation and redistribution of tax and tribute. Kings regularly toured their kingdoms and visited these centres (and their resident officials) in order to reinforce their presence physically, to exert relations of control and clientship, and to collect tribute. Surplus resources, both in terms of people and materials, were used to support a range of specialized activities and to control the production and/or distribution of prestige goods, which could be used both to create and reinforce social positions, and to promote political alliances. But power remained highly devolved and there was always the danger that local leaders might use the considerable power they possessed to oppose their overlords, particularly when Pictland was too large and diverse an area to be easily managed (see below). We can anticipate that there was enormous regional variation in practice on the ground.

In many respects the Church fulfilled a similar role to the secular élite, as landowners loyal to the king who strove to support the system that provided them with the resources to live and undertake their missionary work. But in addition, and most importantly, they provided ideological sanction and legitimization for the kings and nobility. Indeed, the introduction of Christianity is likely to have been the biggest force for change in the early historic period, as people throughout Scotland became part of an international and outward-looking community. Christianity also revolutionized the character of kingship. The Church influenced how kings were chosen and strove to introduce a more peaceful society in which there was no place for the aggression of petty kings.

Whether as clients of the nobility or Church, the majority of the population continued, throughout this period, to provide the agricultural wealth from which royal authority was ultimately derived. At the local level the nature of lordship obviously changed, and the peasantry would presumably have been aware of owing allegiance to an overking whom they might never see. Through the missionary activities of the Church their expectations of life, society and authority would also gradually have been reshaped.

Deciding whether and at what moment Pictland had developed into a state is rather an invidious exercise, given that so many possible definitions exist for this term. That said, it is not inappropriate to acknowledge that Pictland possessed many of the attributes of an early state: power was clearly highly devolved but, nonetheless, Pictland was a definite territory with demarcated divisions that were administered by 'institutions' who attempted to ensure that there was centralized control of resources and military force; there were probably full-time specialists, society was highly stratified, people owed tribute and undoubtedly military service, and use was made of literacy, even if exploitation of its full potential was yet to materialize.

When?

As discussed in chapter 3, the most crucial period in the development of Pictish statehood was the late 7th century, when there was a conscious and determined extension and consolidation of royal authority. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the erection of symbol-incised stones relates in some way to this historical process, as discussed in chapter 5. From this time onwards there is clear evidence that the Church was exerting a considerable influence on Pictland, and the ambitions of its active clergy were closely integrated with the political aspirations of the social élite.

Further direct evidence for the advent of political consolidation could, in theory, be sought from the introduction and evolution of sophisticated divisions of land and associated administration that developed in Pictland. The creation of the role of thane marks a crucial stage in the development of society when, due to the expansion of their territories, kings were no longer considered part of one's extended family. Although much of the evidence for thanes is later in date, the role, if not the terminology, undoubtedly originates during the Pictish period. The large number of later thanages at places with pre-Gaelic names implies a pre-9th-century origin, and it is tempting to assume that many symbol-bearing cross-slabs show the location of the religious and/or secular centres of these land units.

We need not doubt that the Pictish kingdom was at its greatest extent during the 8th century, before the Viking incursions had begun to nibble away at its edges. By this time it had also reached a high level of maturity and sophistication. Not least, it had its own head church at St Andrews (founded between 729 and 747). Clearly a very wealthy foundation, the mainstream European aspirations of the Pictish kings are exemplified in the St Andrews Sarcophagus (23), testimony to a vibrant native Church. Indeed, the range and proliferation of later carved stones testify not simply to the wealth of the kingdom, but to its new-found security in the arms of the Church. This, then, might be described as the Pictish golden age, the century or so before the major impact of aggressive and acquisitive Gaelic lords from the west began to make its mark.

Where?

If we follow Fraser (2003), then even in the time of Bridei son of Mailcon the Pictish power base was already in southern Scotland. By the later 7th century Fortriu in the Fife/Perthshire area had become synonymous with the Pictish nation, reflecting its role at the core of a Pictish kingdom that exercised control beyond its borders in regions that likely included Argyll and parts of Strathclyde in the middle of the 8th century (what Woolf 2001a refers to as the Verturian hegemony). The continued importance of what had been the base of the 4th-century Verturiones need not surprise us, given the agricultural wealth of this area. Such abundance may have precipitated the need for more complex mechanisms to accommodate its exploitation including, as Woolf tentatively suggests, the continuation of the means of tribute extraction that the Bernicians introduced in the earlier 7th century. Furthermore, this was an area in which the Church had a presence from an early, sub-Roman, date.

With its southern power base and developing nature of kingship through time, we have noted in chapters 3 and 4 some of the different ways in which lordly power was manifest on the ground, and how this changed as the monarchs became more powerful and had less need of their traditional centres of leadership and cult (Campbell 2003 describes this process as 'ecological alienation').

Cinaed mac Ailpín

Cinaed mac Ailpín's background is rather obscure. He was probably related to the Cenél nGabráin and there is no evidence that he was ever a king of Argyll. His achievement was to seek and ultimately obtain the 'prize' of Pictland. Undoubtedly the agricultural wealth of Pictland was an enormous temptation to power-hungry warlords, but he may also have been impelled to move east due to the pressure of Viking attacks on Argyll, which had the added effect of blocking him from moving north and cutting the Dál Riata off from their Irish homeland. His ambitions were helped by the fact that many of the Pictish nobles had already been wiped out by the Vikings in 839; the tradition that he was personally responsible for the treacherous death of the Pictish nobility at a feast in Scone is likely to be fictitious. Nonetheless, despite the apparent power vacuum, there was obviously local resistance to his leadership (four Pictish kings are recorded during the early years of his leadership), which was not successfully eradicated until 848.

Across Europe at this time kings were increasingly operating their government from monastic centres, and we see strong hints of this in Scotland (Woolf 2001a). Cinaed mac Ailpín chose to cultivate the Pictish centre at Scone to become his new royal power base and inauguration site, and invested the church at Dunkeld with some of St Columba's relics. In doing so he was affirming the extension of his authority into the heartland of the Picts. His choice of Dunkeld is a reflection of its long-standing significance as an early historic power centre (probably sited at King's Seat) and its earlier significance as a prehistoric tribal centre (if the derivation of its name, 'fortress of the Caledones', is any guide). Cinaed's personal role in bringing Columba's relics to Dunkeld reinforces the close relationship between the monarchy and the upper echelons of the Church. The presence of well-established Gaelic settlement in this area may also be relevant, for it appears to have been subject to considerable migration since at least 739, when *Athfotla*, 'new Ireland', is first referred to as a name for the region.

At this time, Cinaed's leadership was probably not considered any more unusual than some of his predecessors. Why then are all Scottish kings numbered from him, and why does he tend to be credited with laying the foundations of the modern Scottish nation? The answer lies in the fact – which could only be recognized later – that he was the founder of the first Scottish royal dynasty. Not only did his sons succeed him but, after a minor break between 878 and 889, the family line was continued by alternating kingship between different lines of a small kin group. This transformation in modes of inheritance marks a distinct break with past practice, where inheritance had been determined from within a larger eligible kin group. That this change was accepted may be largely due to the influence of the Church (see chapter 3). Modern historians now recognize the events of c. 900 (see below) as being the more important landmark than 842. So, although our view of the significance of Cinaed mac Ailpín in the origins of the Scottish nation is now diminished, his special place in history rests on the fact that he was recognized shortly afterwards as being the founder of the dynasty that had made Alba its own (Broun 1997 and 1999). The ultimate success of the dynasty rests with the achievements of Cinaed's late-9th/early-10th-century successors, Domnall mac Cusantín (Donald II: 889–900) and, in particular, Cusantín mac Aeda (Constantine II: 900–943).

Around this time the Pictish king-list was expanded to include a foundation legend that described the origin of the seven kingdoms of Pictland. According to Nicholas Evans, this is an early example of how the mac Ailpín dynasty (which reigned from 848 to 1034) was to exploit literacy to shape its new image and assert its control of Pictish territory, in this instance by creating a tradition that the Picts had, from the beginning, lived in a unified territory.

The birth of Alba

Around 900 the territorial term 'Alba' was first coined to replace the ethnically based term 'Pictland', which had continued in use after the accession of Cinaed mac Ailpín. Alba was originally the Gaelic word for Great Britain as a whole. It now expressed a new type of nation and a more territorial notion of kingship. Domnall mac Cusantín became the first person to be described as 'King of Alba' and his was also the last reign in which the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* referred to *Pictavia*.

A pivotal event took place in 906 that has been described as the symbolic moment in which the kingdom of Alba was created (Bannerman 1997; Clancy 2003). On this occasion Cusantín mac Aeda, Bishop Cellach, 'and the Scots likewise, upon the hill of Faith near the royal city of Scone, swore to preserve the laws and disciplines of the Faith and the rights in church and gospels', an act that Clancy (1996) interprets as the establishment of parity between the practices of the church in Ireland and Alba, an important confirmation of the relationship between the state and a *céli Dé*-oriented Church. The emergence of Scone as a new ceremonial centre for Alba at this time, and its explicit connections with the church, can also be seen as the clearest evidence for a change in the nature of kingship (Driscoll 1998b; 2002).

Scottish identity

With the apparent disregard for Pictish characteristics and the conscious coining of a new name for the kingdom, it becomes appropriate for the first time for us to refer to both the Gaelic and Pictish inhabitants of Alba as Scots. Contemporary literature refers to them as *fir Alban*, 'men of Scotland', and the first people who thought of themselves as 'Scots' in any way ancestral to the sense we use today were, therefore, the 10th-century Gaelic speakers of Alba (Broun 1994; 1996; 1997). External parties also acknowledged a distinction; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* first refers to rulers of Alba as kings of the Scots during the early 10th century.

What happened to the Pictish identity?

The major suppression of characteristic Pictish activities relates to the period between the end of the 9th century and mid- to late-10th century (Broun 1999). The term 'Picts' was used only in foreign sources until 918. According to later sources, the Picts were totally wiped out (Declaration of Arbroath 1320) or ousted from their heritage (*The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*), and their language had disappeared by c. 1130. It is true that the Pictish language did indeed disappear and this means that there must have been a period of second language acquisition by Picts at all levels in the 9th century, and indeed, noting the presence of Dál Riata settlers in Pictland, even earlier. Yet the demise of Pictish language and identity cannot have been simply the result of an overhaul of the nobility. It is likely to have been exacerbated by a combination of the social and economic upheavals that followed in the wake of frequent Viking attacks and the aggression of a vigorously pro-Church and anti-Pictish Gaelic church, including the rise of the *céli Dé* movement (Wormald 1996; Broun 1997; Woolf 2001b). It is fair to say that the Gaels eschewed the use of the blatantly Pictish symbols but the presence or absence of Pictish symbols is not much help in understanding the process by which Pictish identity was lost since it is clear that Picts themselves were very selective about what contexts and places they were used in. It cannot be proven whether Pictish manuscripts, if they existed in any large number, were consciously destroyed at this time, as has also been suggested.

The Picts themselves had not disappeared, but their identity was subsumed under the new terminology of Alba – they had become Scots. But while the Pictish identity might

96 Sueno's Stone, front face, Scotland's tallest cross-slab at more than 6.5 m (21 ft) high.



have been eradicated, their legacy was not. It was in fact their kingship that continued while that of Dál Riata disappeared. Furthermore, there were aspects of Pictish culture that were adopted by the Scots. Foremost was their form of land organization, which alone suggests considerable continuity in the population at large.

In addition, the primacy of St Andrews, the head Church of Pictland, was not eclipsed, despite the increasing importance of Dunkeld. A monastery was probably founded at St Andrews in the reign of Onuist (729–61). Cellach, its bishop in 906, was apparently chief bishop of the whole nation, a pre-eminence that St Andrews appears to have retained.

Extent of Alba

The extent of Pictland was curtailed by Viking incursions into Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles, and ultimately Caithness and Sutherland. Scholars argue about what happened to the Picts in areas where the Vikings arrived and settled (Barrett 2003). Beyond these areas of direct Viking encroachment it is clear that the wider disruption may have provided the opportunity for the introduction of a new political structure. By the time the term 'Alba' was coined, it could therefore only have applied to a restricted part of former Pictland, perhaps just the region between the Spey, Forth and *Druim n'Alban*, an area comparable in size to other early historic kingdoms. There is some debate as to whether or not what remained of northern Pictland – that is, Moray – was independent at this time (see opposing views in Bannerman 1997 and Woolf 2000). No doubt there were tensions here, for there were problems from the mid-

10th century onwards, culminating in the short-lived takeover of Scotland by MacBethad mac Findlaích (Macbeth: 1040–57), *mormaer* of Moray, an event later immortalized by William Shakespeare.

Sueno's Stone may have been erected as a memorial to one of the conflicts between the Scots and the men of Moray – the association of the stone with Sueno (Sven Cnutsson, king of Norway from 1030–34) was proposed by early antiquarians but has not been supported by the evidence. On one side is a long panel with a cross (96), much of which is filled with fine interlace. Beneath this is a panel with opposed figures, to which we shall return. On the sides are panels of inhabited vine scroll, a distinctive form of decoration that the Picts adopted (and adapted) from the Northumbrians. The opposite side is divided into four panels, each of which is crowded with scenes from a battle, with rows of regimented foot-soldiers, archers and horsemen – and the lines of slain and beheaded warriors (93).

The stone cannot be precisely dated, but probably belongs to some time between the mid-9th and early 10th centuries. Radiocarbon dates from excavated timber sockets around its base, possibly for the scaffolding used to erect the weighty stone, broadly confirm this date-range, and that the stone has been re-erected at some point, though still close to its original location.

If the battle it depicts is not imaginary and contrived solely to convey a series of Christian messages or a foundation legend, it may represent a real battle, most plausibly a conflict between Cinaed mac Ailpín (or one of his descendants) and the men of Moray, in which the Gaels finally succeed in obtaining their submission. The scene beneath the cross has been interpreted as the inauguration ceremony of a mac Ailpín king, surrounded by clerics (perhaps of St Andrews and Scone or Dunkeld) and/or St Andrew and St Columba in person, which tends to support this theory (Sellar 1993). An alternative battle is the one fought by Dubh, one of Cinaed mac Ailpín's successors, who was killed at Forres in 966. There is an early tradition that his body lay beneath the bridge at Kinloss prior to burial, and this bridge is perhaps depicted on the stone, with Dubh's head highlighted by a box around it.

Regardless of whether a real battle is depicted, this monument was created both to express thanks to God and to continually remind all those who viewed it of the authority of the Scottish king, as testified by his military might and the legitimization provided by the Church.

What happened to Argyll?

Cinaed mac Ailpín and his successors settled permanently in the east. A mixed population of Norse and Gaels (*Gall Gaidheil* as they were known by Irish annalists) developed in the Hebrides and along the west coast of Scotland. Argyll, including any parts not settled by the Norse, largely disappears from the records as a separate polity, and it apparently becomes something of a backwater until the rise of the Gaelic-Norse Kingdom of the Isles in the 12th century (Woolf forthcoming). Activity on hilltop power centres was scaled down or abandoned. Devastated by the Vikings from 795–825, Iona (97) retained its place as head of the Columban Church on both sides of the North Channel until the



97 St Columba's shrine, Iona. Unlikely to pre-date the 9th century at the earliest, this rebuilt chapel bears architectural similarities in proportion and style to Irish stone chapels now thought to be 11th or 12th century in date (David Breeze).

Alba in Europe

The development of early Scotland was akin to parallel developments throughout much of western Europe, which saw the expansion and consolidation of kingdoms, and which were also forced to cope with Viking attacks. These kingdoms were likewise united by the presence of Christianity, a force whose religious and intellectual links cut across national boundaries and whose mobile clerics were highly efficient ambassadors for change in political, religious, social and technological spheres.

Obviously it is impossible to perceive Alba as others perceived her. In fact it is surprising that her political precocity did not excite more comment. However, we can state with confidence that the technical, artistic, religious and administrative prowess of the Scots – Dál Riata and Picts – was easily on a par with that of contemporary Europe. Many of their achievements were highly original, even if they had little immediate impact beyond

end of the 9th century (see p. 97). Despite its loss of status and prestige, some of the mac Ailpín kings were probably buried there until 900, and again from the second half of the 10th century, which indicates that the newly constituted kingdom of Alba still had strong connections with the ancestral homeland of its Gaelic kings. This is of particular interest since Iona was clearly also important to the *Gall Gaidheil*, the Norse element of which is thought to have been converted by the still pervasive Gaelic church (Jennings 1998). Sculpture certainly attests to the continuing vitality of Iona and other monasteries in this region (98). Domnall Bán mac Donnchada (Donald III, d. 1097) was the last Scottish king to be buried there, by which time Iona had re-emerged as the centre for the *Gall Gaidheil*. The significance of this area for the Scottish nation was not forgotten. Writing in 1522, Hector Boece informs us in his *History of the Scots* that William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen (1483–1514), was concerned to search out 'the antiquities of the Scottish people, especially in the Hebrides, where are preserved the sepulchres of our ancient kings and the ancient monuments of our race'.

northern Britain. It was not inappropriate for the 9th Commemoration Book of Durham to juxtapose the name of Constantin son of Uurgust with that of Charlemagne, the much-acclaimed emperor of the Franks. A quick glance at intermarriages in the family tree of the mac Ailpín dynasty is misleading, since it would appear to suggest that their interests were restricted to northern Britain. Yet this includes the powerful and vibrant Scandinavian dynasties at York and Dublin, which controlled the coastal waters of western Europe: Alba was thus a full participant in international contacts.

Postscript: the kingdom comes of age

In a long reign Custantin mac Aeda (900–c.945) consolidated the strength of the mac Ailpín dynasty and enlarged the geographical extent of Alba to include Lothian and Strathclyde through a process of military victories and intermarriage. Custantin was also a clever politician, skilfully manipulating the York and Dublin Danes against each other, which also spoiled the interests of the ambitious kings of Wessex. The early 10th-century ruler of Bernicia may also have regarded himself as Custantin's tributary. Thus, by the time he retired to the monastery of St Andrews in c.943/5, the medieval kingdom of Scotland could be said to have come of age. Unfortunately the remaining years of the mac Ailpín dynasty (until 1034) are badly served by both archaeological evidence and historical sources, but by 1018 her southern boundaries had extended to the Solway and Tweed, more or less the limits of modern Scotland. Despite recurrent political crises as rival



98 Cross-slab from Ardchattan Priory, Argyll and Bute, of probable 9th- or 10th-century date (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

99 Brechin was founded by Cinaed mac Mael Coluim (Kenneth II) between 971 and 995. The later round tower, a feature of Irish monasteries, was built between c.1090 and 1130 (compare with the round tower at Abernethy). The roof was capped in the 14th century.



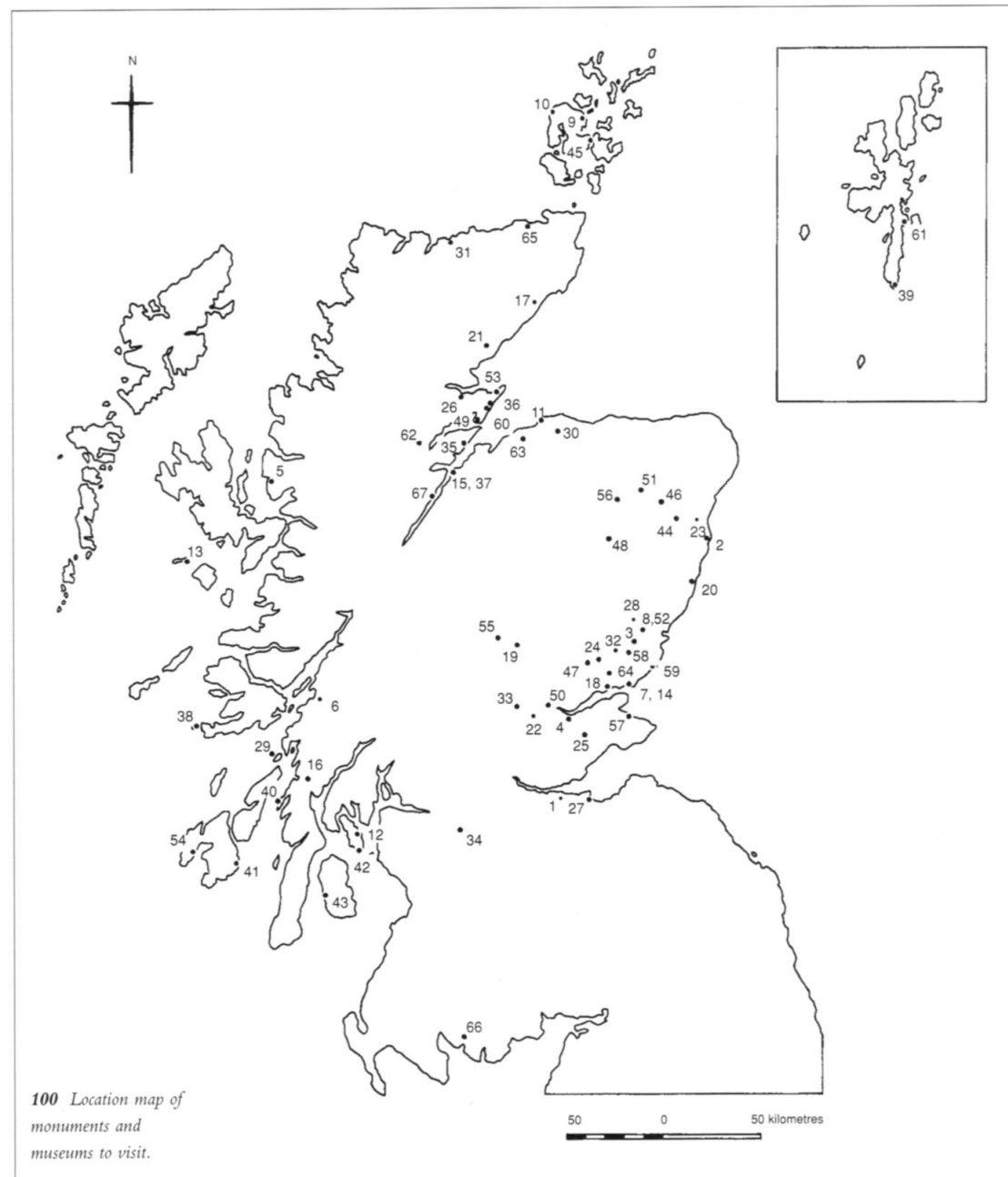
segments of the dynasty competed for power, and steady encirclement by Scandinavian powers, consolidation continued throughout this period. In particular, the Church went from strength to strength (99). Few of the early historic power bases survived to become modern centres as St Andrews did, but we are beginning to identify the origins of new urban centres. Perth, established close to the royal centre at Scone, was undoubtedly under royal authority and control from the beginning. The credit for much of this success lies in the groundwork of the Picts and Dál Riata whose strength, as the emergent nation of Scots, lay not only in their innovative qualities and unique achievements, but in the composite nature of their kingdoms. This story can be picked up in Stephen Driscoll's *Alba: The Gaelic Kingdom of Scotland AD 800-1124*.

One monument alone epitomizes the range of these achievements: the Dupplin Cross (89). Whether this 9th-century monument depicts Constantin son of Uurgust, 'king of Fortriu' (c.789–820), or a later Gaelic king, this monarch is proudly depicted as master of all he surveys: the Pictish agricultural heartland and the royal palace of Forteviot at its centre; at his feet the seriated ranks of his nobility and army. The symbiotic relationship between the Church and state is testified by the juxtaposition of secular and ecclesiastical imagery, a relationship we must assume to have been reiterated in the monument's Latin text. Finally, in his very name – Constantin – we find confirmation of the wider political and religious aspirations of an early historic king, whose political awareness and ambit extended well beyond the shores of Alba.

Monuments and museums to visit

This list confines itself to sites that are publicly accessible; * indicates a charge. For opening times and admission charges for sites in Historic Scotland's care (**in bold**), telephone (0)131 668 8600 or consult www.historic-scotland.gov.uk. For other sites check the web or contact the local Tourist Information Centre. Item numbers refer to the map on page 116; Ordnance Survey grid references follow in brackets.

- 1 **Abercorn Church** (NT 081 790).
Site of Anglian bishopric for the Picts; fine collection of Anglian sculpture.
- 2 **Aberdeen: Marischal Museum**, Marischal College, Broad Street.
Small display on Picts including sculptures from Fairy Knowe and Tillytarmont.
- 3 **Aberlemno** (NO 522 559; NO 522 555).
Four sculptures: symbol-bearing cross-slab with battle scene in churchyard; three stones nearby beside the B9134, including symbol-incised stone and symbol-bearing cross-slab.
- 4 **Abernethy** (NO 189 163).
Round tower at entrance to churchyard; symbol-incised stone at its base.
- 5 **Applecross, church** (NG 713 458).
Site of early monastery, includes several cross-slabs.
- 6 **Ardchattan** (NM 971 349).
Medieval priory with earlier origins; 9th-/10th-century cross-slab.
- 7 **Ardestie souterrain** (NO 502 344).
- 8 **Brechin round tower** (NO 596 600).
Late 11th-/early 12th-century tower. Cathedral contains Aldbar cross-slab, an inscribed slab with Virgin Mary and 11th-century hogback.
- *9 **Broch of Gurness** (HY 381 268).
Pictish house rebuilt to one side of prehistoric remains. Site museum includes symbol-incised stone.
- *10 **Brough of Birsay** (HY 239 285).
Pictish settlement, but most of visible structural remains are Norse and later.
- 11 **Burghead well**, King Street (NJ 110 691).
Remains of fort on headland to west; new visitor centre on headland (below lookout) contains sculptures and interpretation.
- *12 **Bute Museum**, Stuart Street, Rothesay.
Includes sculptures.
- 13 **Canna** (NG 229 043; NG 269 055).
Early monastery at Sgòr nam Ban-Naomha (best seen from cliffs above) and free-standing cross at site of medieval chapel.
- 14 **Carlungie souterrain** (NO 511 359).
- 15 **Craig Phádraig** (NH 640 452).
Iron Age fort reused by Picts.
- 16 **Dunadd**, fort (NR 836 935).
Leading Dál Riata power centre. See also carvings at **Kilmartin church** (NR 834 988) and adjacent ***Kilmartin Museum**.
- *17 **Dunbeath Heritage Centre**
Includes 7th-century Ballachly Stone.
- 18 **Dundee: McManus Galleries**, Albert Square.
Variety of Pictish sculptures, including Benvie. Reconstructed long-cist burial from Lundin Links.



- 19 **Dunfallandy** symbol-bearing cross-slab (NN 946 565).
- *20 **Dunnottar** (NO 881 838).
Medieval castle overlies what may have been a Pictish power centre.
- *21 **Dunrobin Castle Museum**, Sutherland (NC 852 008).
Outstanding collection of 18 Pictish symbol stones.
- 22 **Dupplin Cross**, St Serf's, Dunning (NO 019 144).
- 23 **Dyce** (NJ 875 154).
Shelter within ruins of St Fergus's church houses collection of Pictish sculptures, including newly discovered ogham inscription.
- 24 **Eassie** symbol-bearing cross-slab (NO 352 474).
- 25 **East Lomond Hill**, fort (NO 244 062).
- 26 **Edderton** (NH 719 842).
8th-/9th-century cross-slab in churchyard.
- 27 **Edinburgh: Museum of Scotland**, Chambers Street.
Very large collection of sculptures, includes upper portion of Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab and Portmahomack inscription. Holdings also include St Ninian's Isle treasure, Norrie's Law hoard, Monymusk reliquary, Hunterston brooch and finds from the Brough of Birsay and Dunadd.
- *28 **Edzell** (NO 584 691).
Medieval castle, display includes small but significant fragment of a free-standing cross.
- 29 **Eileach an Naoimh**, Garvellachs (NM 640 097).
Early monastery with well-preserved beehive cells.
- *30 **Elgin Cathedral** (NJ 221 630).
Medieval cathedral includes symbol-bearing cross-slab. ***Elgin Museum** has 17 sculpted stones on display, including shrine fragments from Kinnedar.
- 31 **Farr** (NC 714 622).
9th-century cross-slab in churchyard.
- 32 **Forfar: Meffan Institute**, West High Street (NO 455 505).
Includes sculptures from Kirriemuir, Dunnichen and Wester Denoon.
- 33 **Fowls Wæster** (NN 927 240).
Reconstruction of symbol-bearing cross-slab in centre of village; original now moved into church, alongside a second slab found built into church fabric.
- 34 **Glasgow: Hunterian Museum**, University Avenue.
Finds from Dundurn, Dunollie and Dumbarton.
- *35 **Groam House Museum**, High Street, Rosemarkie.
Large and important collection of Pictish carvings, includes impressive symbol-bearing cross-slab.
- 36 **Hilton of Cadboll**, chapel (NH 873 768).
Modern reconstruction of Pictish cross-slab stands near to findspot.
- 37 **Inverness Museum and Art Gallery**, Castle Wynd.
Various Pictish sculptures, including the Ardross wolfstone, and a carved cannell coal pendant.
- 38 **Iona** (NM 286 245).
Site of Columba's monastery with surviving vallum, series of splendid 8th-century high crosses and large collection of other carvings (in abbey museum and St Ronan's chapel).
- *39 **Jarlshof** (HU 398 095).
Multi-period site includes possible Pictish buildings. See also recently excavated Iron Age and later settlement at ***Old Scatness** (HU 389 106).
- 40 **Keills** (NR 690 806).
Medieval chapel contains high cross, early medieval and later carvings.

- 41 **Kildalton**, Islay (NR 458 508).
Finest surviving high cross in Scotland.
- 42 **Kingarth**, Bute (NS 094 534).
12th-century church, site of St Bláán's monastery. Includes early gravestones and the 'cauldron', possibly an early Christian building.
- 43 **King's Caves**, Arran (NR 884 309).
Walk from Forest Enterprise car-park near Blackwaterfoot. Cave (restricted access) contains many early Christian and later carvings, including ogham inscriptions.
- 44 **Kintore church**, symbol-incised stone (NJ 793 162).
- 45 **Kirkwall, Orkney: Orkney Museum, Tankerness House**, Broad Street.
Includes finds from Brough of Birsay, Pool, Howe, Buckquoy, Skaill in Deerness and various Pictish stones, including Knowe of Burrian.
- 46 **Maiden Stone**, symbol-bearing cross-slab (NJ 703 247).
- *47 **Meikle** (NO 287 445).
Museum contains one of the most notable assemblages of early historic sculpture in western Europe.
- 48 **Migvie** symbol-bearing cross-slab (NJ 436 068).
- 49 **Nigg**, church (NH 804 717).
Contains superb late 8th-century symbol-bearing cross-slab.
- 50 **Perth Museums and Art Galleries**, George Street. Sculptures from Inchyra, Gellyburn, St Madoes and New Scone.
- 51 **Picardy**, symbol-incised stone (NJ 609 302).
- 52 ***Pictavia, Brechin** (NO 577 599).
Exhibition about Picts includes sculptures from Menmuir and Farnell as well as many replicas.
- *53 **Portmahomack: Tarbat Discovery Centre** (NH 914 840).
Exhibition in church tells the story of this important monastery and Picts in the north from recent excavation discoveries and other sculpture.
- 54 **Port Charlotte: Museum of Islay Life**.
Large collection of sculptures.
- 55 **Queen's View**, ring-fort (NN 863 601).
- 56 **Rhynie Old Churchyard**, symbol-incised stones (NJ 499 264).
- *57 **St Andrews Cathedral** (NO 514 166).
Museum includes the internationally significant St Andrews Sarcophagus and an important, large collection of other sculptures.
- 58 **St Orland's** symbol-bearing cross-slab (NO 400 500).
Rare depiction of a boat.
- 59 **St Vigean's, Arbroath** (NO 638 429).
A personal favourite. Museum in charming village contains important collection of Pictish carvings from adjacent church (on its distinctive mound).
- 60 **Shandwick**, symbol-bearing cross-slab (NH 855 747).
- *61 **Shetland Museum**, Lower Hillhead, Lerwick.
Includes sculpted stones from Papil and Mail and copy of St Ninian's Isle treasure.
- 62 **Strathpeffer** (NH 484 585).
Symbol-incised stone.
- 63 **Sueno's Stone** (NJ 046 595).
Tallest medieval sculpture in Scotland; includes unusual battle imagery.
- 64 **Tealing souterrain** (NO 412 381).
- *65 **Thurso Heritage Museum**, High Street.
Includes two Pictish sculptures.
- 66 **Trusty's Hill, Anwoth** (NX 588 560).
Carvings on living rock by entrance to fort, perhaps evidence for a Pictish raiding party.
- *67 **Urquhart Castle** (NH 530 286).
Medieval castle overlies Pictish power centre that St Columba may have visited.

Further reading

If you are interested in reading more about a particular archaeological site then the best starting point is CANMORE, the National Monuments Record of Scotland available as an online database at www.rcahms.gov.uk. Details of unpublished excavations can sometimes be found by searching the web. See also the Scottish Place-Name Society (www.st-and.ac.uk/institutes/sassi/spns/index.htm) and Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (www.scran.ac.uk).

Early Historic texts

- Adomnán of Iona. *Life of Columba*, trans. R. Sharpe, Harmondsworth, 1995.
Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, ed. A O and M O Anderson, Oxford, 1991.
Gododdin – see Clancy (ed.) 1998.
Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, trans. L. Sherley-Price, rev. R. E. Latham as *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Harmondsworth, 2nd rev. edn, 1990.

Specialist works on the Picts, Gaels and Scots

Works cited in text and below are the most apt modern works; their bibliographies will provide further reading for the history of the development of ideas.

- Alcock, L. 1987 'Pictish Studies: Present and Future' in Small (ed.), pp. 80–92.
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Glossary

annals Records of the events happening in a given year; usually maintained by clerics.

barrow An earthen burial mound.

broch Monumental, stone-built roundhouse constructed around 2,000 years ago, with notable architectural details such as intramural cells and at least one upper storey or gallery.

C-14 see **radiocarbon dating**

cist (long or short) A stone-lined and capped rectangular tomb.

coenobiticism The practice of monks living in a religious community (rather than separately).

crannog Offshore (usually loch-side) structure, built of wood and stone, with houses and other buildings on it.

crop mark Buildings and structures that have been ploughed flat, leaving no visible traces at ground level. In favourable conditions sub-surface features, e.g. ditches, may be visible due to differential rates of crop growth (or drying of soil).

dendrochronology A means of dating based on the identification, counting and comparison of annual growth rings in ancient wood.

Druim n'Alban The Old Irish name given to the body of Scottish mountains that are described by Adomnán as dividing the Picts from their Gaelic neighbours to the west; contemporary Latin annals referred to *dorsum Britanniae*, 'the spine of Britain'.

dun Thick, stone-walled enclosure, usually sub-circular in plan, often likely to have been roofed, and interpreted as a defensive farmstead.

escutcheon Applied ornament, invariably round, often doubling as the means by which a handle can be attached to the object.

fieldwalking The systematic survey of freshly ploughed fields for artefacts that have been

disturbed and brought to the surface.

food renders Taxes given by clients to their lords in the form of food.

henge A monument constructed in the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age (about 4,500 years ago): a sacred space defined by circular banks with internal ditches and at least one entrance.

Indo-European The name given to a family of languages that spread throughout Europe and much of southern Asia during early prehistory. Finnish, Hungarian, Basque and Estonian are the only surviving non-Indo-European languages in modern Europe.

Insular art A style of art that developed in Ireland, Scotland and Northumbria during the early historic period. Sometimes also referred to as 'Hiberno-Saxon'.

Iron Age In Scottish terms, the period from c. 600 BC to AD 1000; the Late Iron Age (AD 400–1000) in northern and western Scotland is also known as the early historic period.

material culture The physical remains from the past (artefacts, buildings and so on) as studied, characterized and interpreted by archaeologists.

matrilineal succession Inheritance passed to males through the female line.

midden Rubbish heap.

mormaer Ruler of a province.

Mounth The traditional boundary between the northern and southern Picts, as broadly defined by the Grampian mountains.

radiocarbon dating (C-14) A means of dating based on measuring the proportions of the C-14 to C-12 isotopes in organic matter, since this proportion changes at a known rate. These results can be calibrated to produce a calendrical date-range, although variable rates

of certainty have to be attached to these, and they cannot pinpoint a particular year, as dendrochronology potentially can.

ring-fort Thick, stone-walled enclosure, usually sub-circular in plan, unlikely to have been roofed.

Spine of Britain see *Druim n'Alban*.

soil mark see **crop mark**.

souterrain Semi-subterranean, passage-like structure, usually constructed of stone and associated with above-ground houses.

thane District of land administered by a thane, appointed to do so on behalf of a king or mormaer.

thermoluminescence dating (TL) A means of dating the firing of clay or burning of rocks or deposition of sediments. It is based on measuring luminescence generated in minerals by long-term exposure to natural background radiation, and the strengths of background sources in the sample and its deposition environment. Results are expressed as absolute or calendrical ages. Uncertainties vary from 5–10 per cent of age.

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timber-laced A form of stone or earthen rampart construction in which a timber frame is constructed internally to provide additional strength. When burnt at high temperatures (over 1000° C) the stone may fuse and become distorted (vitrified).

trepanation Deliberate perforation of the skull.

vallum A rampart – with associated ditch(es).

vellum Parchment for writing made from the skin of young calves, kids or sheep.

vitrification see **timber-laced**.

votive deposits Ritual offerings made to the gods.

wheelhouse An Iron Age sub-circular dry-stone building, the roof of which is supported by radial dry-stone piers (like the spokes of a wheel). Found in Shetland and the Western Isles.

★ when used as a prefix, such as ★*aber*, signifies a historical place name reconstructed from later sources.

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