

# The date and origin of the Pictish symbols

Lloyd Laing\* and Jennifer Laing\*

## SUMMARY

*It is suggested on the strength of certain object symbols that some at least of the Pictish symbols originated in the late 4th or early 5th century. The possibility of Roman influence on their design is also considered, in the context of Roman cultural influence in Scotland in the period.*

## INTRODUCTION

The date, origin and meaning of the Pictish symbols have long perplexed scholars, who in the absence of concrete evidence have often ingeniously argued from very tenuous evidence. The symbols have usually been given either a 7th-century or an unknown origin. In the absence of other possibilities these designations have been valid. Work and differing climates of opinion in the past 25 years in particular, however, make it possible to review them.

## RECENT DISCUSSIONS OF THE DATES OF THE PICTISH SYMBOLS

Four major lines of argument exist to the theory that the Pictish symbols originate in the 7th century: through comparison with Northumbrian art, through the dating of the Norrie's Law hoard, through the geographical extent of Dalriada and through Christian associations. None of these arguments seem to us to be unassailable, and are considered below.

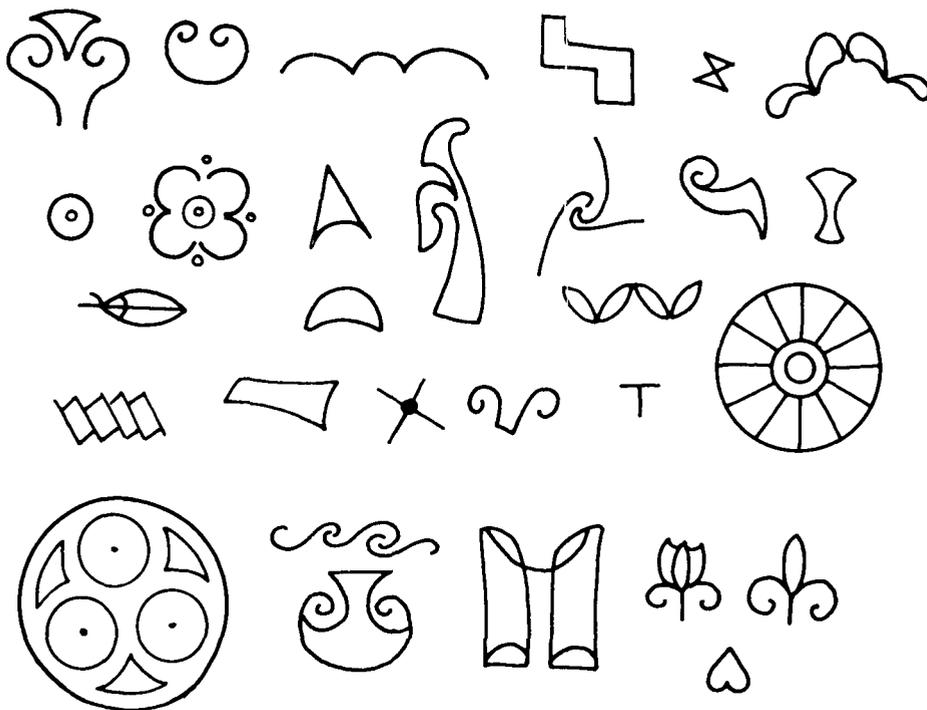
### NORTHUMBRIAN ART

The similarity between Pictish animal symbols and some of the evangelist symbols in gospel books of probable Northumbrian origin (the *Book of Durrow*; the *Echternach Gospels*; *Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 197*) has been discussed, notably by Henderson (1967, 126–7; 1982, 79–82) and Stevenson (1955b, 111; 1970, 69), with some dispute as to which came first. In brief, Stevenson argued that the Pictish symbols were developed from the manuscripts, Henderson that the manuscript creatures were influenced by the symbols.

Problems exist in that while a few animals in the Northumbrian books share some stylistic features with some in the Pictish bestiary, only one creature, the eagle, is found in both (Henderson 1967, 126–7). Thus Class I animal symbols consist almost entirely of creatures without extant parallel.

Building on these two standpoints, it is interesting to follow Jacobsthal's example in his 1944 study of *Early Celtic Art*, and produce a 'Grammar' of the motifs found on all the symbols on Class I stones. The symbols show a very basic repertoire (illus 1). The essential ingredients are

\*School of Archaeology and Oriental Studies, PO Box 147, Liverpool L69 3BY



ILLUS 1 A 'Grammar' of Pictish symbol art

C-scrolls, running scrolls, peltas, ring-and-dot, step patterns, various voids, a few botanical patterns and designs defined by circles.

Many of the botanical patterns correspond to those listed by Elizabeth Fowler in her 'Grammar' of 'Dark Age' art (1963, fig 9), but Fowler includes some patterns (eg bead and reel) absent in Pictish symbol art and omits some elements found in Pictland. A few of the elements are to be found in La Tène art in Britain (cf Fox 1958, figs 82-3), more, such as peltas, ring-and-dot, C-scrolls, running scrolls and step patterns, are to be found in late Romano-British art.

From this short exercise we can see clearly that whilst Class II stones show the complicated triskeles, interlace patterns, key patterns and trumpet patterns similar to those in Northumbrian manuscripts, these designs are conspicuously absent on Class I stones. If it is to be accepted that Class I stones predate Class II, it must surely be accepted too that Class I symbols must predate the Northumbrian manuscripts. It is surely more likely that Class I stones do not include the designs used in Northumbrian manuscripts because these were not yet invented, rather than that they were deliberately omitted from the Class I stone mason's repertoire for reasons unknown.

There is an attractive logic in Stevenson's argument that the symbols copied the manuscripts, reproducing the motifs simply at first, then with increasing expertise, graduating to produce Class II stones. But this cannot be fitted into the late 7th century, not does it fit in with the observation made in 1955 (Stevenson 1955b, 104) that some symbols 'decline'. In the space of a very short time we must picture the symbols being invented from manuscript art, starting to decline, and flourishing with additional material on Class II stones, to the point where, as Henderson has shown, the eagle symbol on the Knowe of Burrian stone (Class I) is more

accomplished than the eagle in the *Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 197* manuscript (produced c 700).

Once we stop trying to fit the development of Pictish Class I and II stones into such a short space of time, none of the observations of others quoted above need be swept aside, but a more credible ancestry for them may be sought, in our view, well before the 7th century.

#### THE NORRIE'S LAW HOARD

The dating of the Norrie's Law, Fife, hoard is often regarded as central to the chronology of the Pictish symbols. Its importance in the context discussed here is that it contained hand-pins and a pair of leaf-shaped silver plaques bearing Pictish symbols.

A series of coins was supposedly associated with the hoard—ranging from one of Antonia, daughter of Mark Antony (*ob* 38 AD) to one identified as being of Tiberius Constantine (*ob* 682 AD) (Anderson 1880, 42, *contra* Thomas 1961, 44 where he states they were of 'Marcus Antonius to a Byzantine late 6th-century'). Elizabeth Fowler accepted the genuine association of a 'sixth century coin' [*sic*] and dated the hoard accordingly (Fowler 1963, 128). However, it is important to note that the only two coins that appear to have been found authentically at the time of the other silver pieces coming to light were two siliquae of Valens and Constantius II (ie from c 337 to 378 AD). We can dismiss the two Roman and Byzantine bronze pieces as they were sold separately to a Miss Dundas by a labourer who said he had found them at Norrie's Law (Anderson 1880, 42). As the Norrie's Law find is clearly a hoard of hack-silver intended for melting down, bronze coins would have no place in it, and following the publicity given to the find, it is likely to have been invented as a provenance to make other coins more marketable; the coins genuinely associated would then suggest a date of deposition for the hoard some time after 380 AD. Charles Thomas has set out a strong case to support the hoard's deposition being before 600 (Thomas 1961, 44–5), and although many of his points have been refuted we would like to bring forward additional arguments for a pre 7th-century date.

In our view the hand-pins from Norrie's Law need not be as late as the 7th century. It is now known that proto hand-pins, decorated with ornament related to that of the Norrie's Law pins, had evolved in Roman Britain by the mid 4th century. This was proved by the inclusion of one with a hoard of Roman coins at Oldcroft, Glos (Johns 1974). A true hand-pin was found at Traprain Law, East Lothian (Close-Brooks 1983, 217), a site which may not have been occupied much after c 430 AD (Alcock 1979, 135).

Stevenson has recently and ingeniously argued that because the hand-pins bear on their edges a pattern of lozenges and dots reminiscent of the graining on the escutcheons of the large Sutton Hoo hanging bowl, they should be regarded as later than the Sutton Hoo bowl, since they are more elaborate (Stevenson 1976, 248). He has acknowledged that the main Sutton Hoo bowl was already old when deposited not later than c 630. David Longley, moreover, has argued that bowls of Sutton Hoo type (though not necessarily that from Sutton Hoo itself) were probably first made sometime in the 5th century (Longley 1975, 20–2). Given that the graining on the Sutton Hoo escutcheon is very basic and that the Sutton Hoo bowl could have been as much as a century old when buried, a pre 7th-century date for the hand-pins is not impossible.

The pair of leaf-shaped plates do not appear to have been fastened on to anything (Stevenson 1976, 249–50). Characteristically ahead of his time Thomas suggested they might have been Pictish versions of Roman phaleræ (1961, 44). Another explanation is that they are votive plaques of the kind found in Roman Britain. These have been discussed by Liversidge (1973, 445–6) – particularly close to the Norrie's Law plaques is a leaf-shaped example from Barkway, Herts (figured in Brailsford 1958, fig 31/9). Similar votive plaques are also found in Christian

contexts, for example in the Water Newton hoard (Painter 1977, pls 10–27). Mr John Eames has drawn our attention to the fact that plaques very similar to those from Norrie's Law are illustrated in the Ravenna Cosmography, where they are associated with a particular office.

The large silver penannular brooches in the hoard belong to Fowler's Class H (1963). This type of brooch with expanded, flattened terminals seems to start in the late Roman period: there is an example from Caernarvon (Wheeler 1923, fig 58/5) in which the terminals are still relatively small. True H brooches, however, do not seem to have been produced until the 5th century – Longley has suggested c 450 (1975, 10). By the 7th century more elaborate types with decorated terminals were in fashion, so the Norrie's Law examples belong, on typological grounds, to the 5th–6th centuries.

One further object in the hoard should be considered here: This is a silver plate with three (originally four?) raised spiral bosses with trumpet-ended stalks (Stevenson 1976, 249). Stevenson has drawn attention to the similarity of these bosses to those on a silver brooch from Ardakillen crannog, Co Roscommon, discussed by Henry (1965, 9–10), who quotes Aberg as saying it is a copy of a 7th-century Merovingian type. There are several objections to this rather involved association. Firstly, the Ardakillen brooch bosses are peltas, whereas the bosses on the Norrie's Law object are really spirals. Secondly, the pelta pattern on the Ardakillen brooch lacks the trumpet pattern ends and broken backs made of confronted trumpet patterns seen on the Norrie's Law plate. We suggest that the Norrie's Law bosses are much closer to the ornament displayed on a series of Irish discs, of which that from Monasterevin is probably the most famous (for a discussion with refs: Megaw 1970, 158 no 269). They are often assigned to the 2nd century AD on account of the similarity of their ornament to that on some 'Caledonian' pieces of metalwork, such as the Deskford carnyx. Since there is no dating evidence for the Irish pieces, the Norrie's Law plate could be virtually any date after the climax of the Caledonian metalworking school.

On present evidence, therefore, there seems to be little objection to the Norrie's Law hoard having been deposited before the late 7th century, and it could have been deposited as early as the 5th.

#### THE PICTISH SYMBOLS AND DALRIADA

An assumption, first voiced by Anderson and Allen (1903, cv) and repeated by most writers on the subject since, is that the distribution of Class I stones does not extend to the area of the Scottish kingdom of Dalriada. From this it has been inferred that the stones post-date the 5th century formation of Dalriada.

It is quite clear that Class I stones are likely to have been produced over a fairly prolonged period of time, to allow some of the symbols to deviate from the original correct form (Stevenson's 'declining symbols' – 1955b, 104). Henderson has argued that the 'earliest' forms of the symbol stones are all to be found in the Moray Firth area, most notably round Golspie (1958, 56).

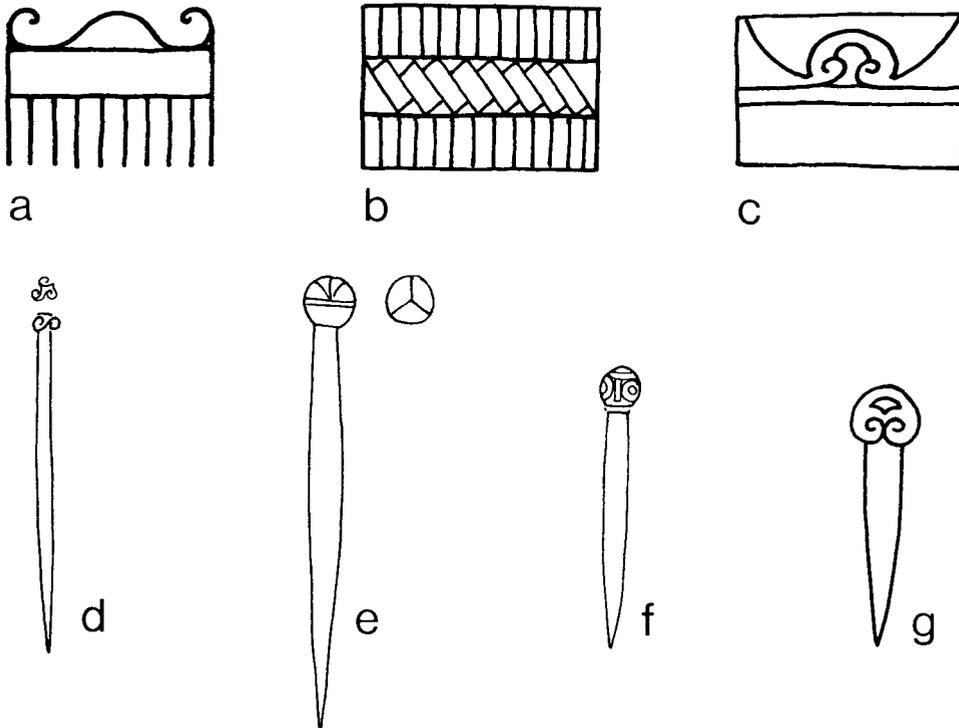
If this is accepted, it is possible that the symbols were invented before the creation of Dalriada and simply failed to spread from north-east Scotland immediately. The symbol stones can then be seen as a product of a cultural tradition which was already discernible before the Picts as such emerged into the light of history. MacKie has argued that it is possible to trace the underlying cultural pattern of the early Christian period from the Iron Age (MacKie 1970).

#### CHRISTIANITY AND THE SYMBOLS

Since the symbols appear with the Cross and scenes of undoubtedly Christian significance on Class II stones, it has been suggested that they must also be Christian.

This argument cannot stand, however, since the presence of pagan motifs is also common in early Christian art. Frequently pagan themes were ‘converted’ to serve a Christian purpose. Early Christianity was much concerned with the ‘defusing’ of pagan ideas by turning them to Christian advantage. Professor Jocelyn Toynbee has discussed at length pagan motifs and practices in Christian art and ritual in Roman Britain (Toynbee 1968), and Dr Anne Ross has shown how elements of pagan Celtic cult practices survive into historic times (Ross 1974, 289). The Franks Casket, which is contemporary with the Northumbrian ‘Golden Age’ manuscripts, displays a mixture of pagan and Christian scenes, and Viking Age sculpture in the North of England often borrows from pagan Norse mythology for the decorative themes for its crosses (Bailey 1980, 235–7). The Christian Picts were clearly not averse to borrowing motifs from a pagan past; Meigle 22, a Class III stone (ie found in Pictland but without symbols), displays a relief of the pagan Celtic god Cernunnos (Ross 1974, 185–6).

It is extremely likely that the animal symbols are of pagan origin. Relatively few animals are represented, and the majority were important in Celtic cults. Ross has discussed at length the boar (1974, 390–404) wolf (*ibid*, 426–7), goose (*ibid*, 435–6), bull (*ibid*, 384–90), horse (*ibid*, 404–17), stag (*ibid*, 417–23), dog (*ibid*, 423–6), snake (*ibid*, 430–32) and salmon (*ibid*, 436–7), all of which were sacred to the pre-Christian Celts. This does not of course mean that the Picts who drew them might not also have been Christian, but their iconography was different from that of the 7th-century classical tradition and they were not Christian symbols as such.



ILLUS 2 Combs and pins: (a) comb symbol, Clynmilton 2; (b) comb symbol generalized; (c) comb case symbol, Clynekirkton; (d) bronze stick pin with triskele head, Ireland; (e) bone stick pin, Broch of Burrian (f) bone stick pin, Rosemarkie; (g) Pictish symbol, usually termed a ‘sword’ from Trusty’s Hill (various scales)

### FURTHER DATING EVIDENCE FOR THE PICTISH SYMBOLS

Having argued for a pre 7th-century date, we now wish to dispute that the Pictish symbols are all necessary as early as the Iron Age (Thomas 1961).

Two main types of comb are represented on the stones. The first is exemplified by a stone from Clynemilton, Sutherland, known as Clynemilton 2. This is a single-sided comb, but has a domed back with a pair of inturning volutes, giving it trilobate design (illus 2a). A simplification of this type is represented on Kintradwell 3, in the same county.

The single-sided comb with trilobate back is a relatively rare type. The classic form has pairs of confronted animals on either side of a central 'dome'. In origin these combs are Frisian, and belong to a type current for a relatively short period in the 4th–5th centuries. The confronted animals are in the same general tradition as those that decorate some Germanic metalwork of the period, studied by Hawkes and Dunning (1961). In England the true 'Frisian' type flares out at the teeth, and has been studied by Arthur Macgregor (1975). But just as the metalwork was copied in Britain (Hawkes & Dunning 1961, 21) so too were the combs. Just such a copy is known from London (Baldwin Brown 1915, Pl LXXVII/1), which can be compared with a copy of a buckle from Catterick, Yorks, figured by Hawkes and Dunning (1961, fig 22), decorated in a similar style. The type was also found at Dun Cuier, Barra (Young 1956, fig 13/1).

It is very unlikely that the copies are much later than the currency of the originals. They soon started to devolve and lose some of their zoomorphic characteristics: there is one of simplified type from Lagore (Hencken 1950, fig 99).

It is possible that in Orkney they devolved some time before the Viking period into a type of single-sided comb with high back formed of several plates of bone. This type was represented at Buckquoy in the final Norse phase (phase V), where it was regarded as residual (Ritchie 1977, fig 7), and at the Broch of Burrian (Macgregor 1974, 80). It is possible that it is this type of comb that is intended to be represented in the symbol known at the 'comb case', seen for instance at Clynekirkton, Sutherland (2c), but it is not very likely since this type of comb appears to be confined to Orkney (Ritchie 1977, 188), and does not bear any curvilinear ornament.

The double-sided composite comb has a long currency in the Early Christian period. There is one from Buston crannog, Ayr, usually dated to the 7th century (illustrated in Laing 1979, pl 73), and there is a series from Lagore crannog, Co Meath (Hencken 1950, fig 97, 1563). A further series comes from the Broch of Burrian (Macgregor 1974, 80–4), and from Dinas Powys, Glam (Alcock 1963, 154–9). They are also common in pagan Saxon graves. Their origin lies in the Roman period. Hencken pointed out that they first occur in La Tène contexts in Bohemia, but were taken up by the Romans in Western Germany as a result of Frankish influence (Hencken 1950, 184). Alcock inclined to the view that they were bone versions of box-wood combs and had to be composite because of their size (Alcock 1963, 155). Nearly all the known examples from Roman contexts belong to the late 4th century, for example at Lydney, Glos (Wheeler 1932, pl, 181), Richborough, Kent (Bushe-Fox 1932, 82) or Wroxeter, Salop (Bushe-Fox 1913, pl IX, 4). The earliest recorded instance in Roman Britain is, however, dated c 220 at Jewry Wall, Leicester (Kenyon 1948, fig 92/7) (illus 2b).

The dating of the combs shows that some of the symbols are no earlier than the 3rd or 4th century AD, and that some are no earlier than the first half of the 5th.

#### OTHER SYMBOLS

On the carving from Trusty's Hill, Kirkcudbright, an object is represented which has been reasonably interpreted by Thomas as a sword (1963, 53 no 18) (illus 2g), except that it is more

like a stick pin of the type called 'triskele-headed'. Such a pin comes from the Broch of Burrian (Stevenson 1955a, fig A6), and they are relatively common in Ireland (Armstrong 1922, fig 1 for a series). The Burrian example is probably 5th century (illus 2f).

John Morris suggested that the double disc symbol on the Dunnichen Stone, Angus, imitated a Saxon saucer brooch (Morris 1975, 571). While accepting his comparison, it ought to be noted that the type of brooch imitated is one with five running scrolls, a type studied by Leeds (1912) and which should now be seen as 5th-century rather than 6th, as Morris suggested.

### A POSSIBLE ORIGIN FOR THE SYMBOLS

If the foregoing arguments can be accepted, then we must look for another context for the development of the art that would allow the Picts to adopt such close parallels to the Northumbrian art of the 7th century as to be almost identical, and, furthermore, display those Eurasiatic and 'Germanic' elements noticed first by Minns (1944) and elaborated by Thomas (1961), which have generally been discussed ever since. We must, following Charles Thomas's pointers 20 years ago, and developments in other areas since, consider Roman Britain. We would argue that the elements shared in common by Pictish Class I stones and Northumbrian manuscripts arrived in Pictland and Northumbria by a different route but from a common late Roman source.

In the 4th and 5th centuries Roman provincial art was modified by the assimilation of elements of barbarian origin, which had been developed beyond the Imperial frontiers. This hybrid provincial art gained wide currency in the northern provinces of the Empire, and also inspired the barbarian art of the homelands of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who used it as one of the springboards for their development of Salin's Style I.

A taste for this artistic tradition probably reached Northumbria by two routes – an original introduction to the area in late Roman Britain before the formation of Bernicia and Deira, and a secondary introduction by the incoming Angles, whose art was already coloured by it.

In Pictland the context for its introduction must have been the period in the 4th and 5th centuries when Picts were first attacking the northern frontiers of Britannia and thereafter when kingdoms were developing on their southern borders modelled on Roman provincial administrations (see below).

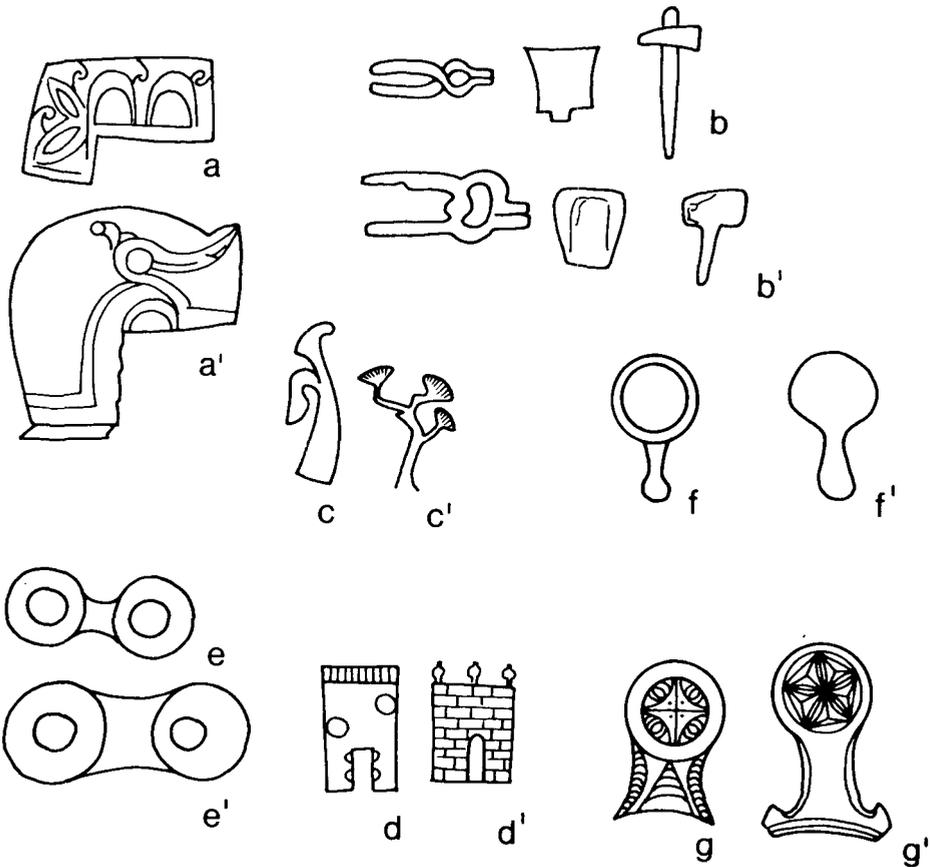
Surely then we have the melting pot that led to Class I symbols: Celtic subjects interpreted in both Classical and Germanic tradition. There is no need to look for typological exactitudes: in Roman Britain we can find examples of all the elements to be found in Pictish symbols. The following examples are taken more or less at random, in an exercise which gives greater rather than less credence to the belief that the Roman models formed the inspiration for the Pictish symbols.

### SOME COMPARISONS BETWEEN ROMAN AND PICTISH MOTIFS

The similarity of the shield and spear that appear on a stone from Newton of Lewesk to representations of Roman triumphal trophies has frequently been noted.

A symbol usually described as 'L-shaped rectangular figure' could in fact represent a Roman helmet, of the type known from the find from Guisborough, Yorks, usually dated to the late 3rd century (Brailsford 1958, pl XXVI, 3) (illus 3a and a<sup>1</sup>).

Three symbols, tongs, anvil and hammer, almost identical in form to those that appear on Pictish symbol stones, occur together on Roman pots, for example on one from Colchester (Toynbee 1963, 191, 162). Toynbee suggested that these pots dated from the late Roman period,



ILLUS 3 Comparisons between Pictish symbols and Roman motifs and objects: see text for descriptions

and may have had some association with the cult of Vulcan – there are two from Yorkshire and one from Co Durham (Toynbee 1963, 192) (illus 3b and b').

The 'flower' symbol may simply be a stylized version of a plant motif. One is here figured that appears on a 4th century silver dish from Corbridge (illus 3c and c').

The mirror symbol has of course an archaeological model in the mirror from Inishkea North, Co Mayo, published by Henry (1952) who dated it to the 7th century, but there is no unassailable reason to date it to this period. The Inishkea mirror handle (if that is what it is) is very close in style to the Balmaclellan mirror from Kirkcudbright, found in 1861 and dated to the 2nd century AD (for discussion, Fox 1958, 99). There is no reason to suppose that Pictish mirrors were not evolved from those of Balmaclellan type in Roman Iron Age. The Balmaclellan mirror was probably a Brigantian product, so perhaps such products were reaching Scotland in the 2nd century or even the late 1st. The Inishkea handle need not be Irish but could be an import from Pictland. The mirror symbol could thus have evolved at any point after the 2nd century AD. A more directly Roman model for the mirror, is, however, not difficult to find. One closely comparable, dating from the 4th century, is that depicted with Venus in a mosaic from Rudston, Yorks (illus 3f and f'). Recently Dr Glenys Lloyd-Morgan has argued in favour of a Roman model both for the handled mirror and a lidded mirror which she believes is represented in a double disc symbol (1980, 98–100).

The 'notched rectangle' could be based on several possible Roman prototypes. One possibility is the Constantinian series of 'camp gate' coins, which are among the commonest of all Roman issues (illus 3d and d<sup>1</sup>). Roman altars could be the models for several of the Pictish symbols, as could Roman tombstones or inscriptions. An altar from Eastgate, Co Durham, furnishes us with dolphins which could be the models for the 'hippocamp' (the 'Pictish beast') that appears on some Pictish stones, as well as possible models for the crescent. The hippocamp, which is certainly a Classical creature, appears for example on stones from Brodie and Ulbster. The pelta pattern of Pictish art could be derived from the peltas which adorn the ends of building inscriptions (Thompson 1978, for a series of examples, including one from the Antonine Wall, distance slab *RIB* 2185, with a marigold pattern on it). Even more noteworthy, an altar from Vindolanda (Chesterholm) is decorated with a double disc symbol and a rectangle (Birley 1977, 12) (illus 3e and e<sup>1</sup>).

The 'circular disc and rectangle' symbol could represent a Roman patera handle (illus 3g and g<sup>1</sup>). The symbol sometimes has clearly concave sides, for example on the Kintradwell stone, Caithness, where the central perforation is also clearly visible. The type of patera represented is not unknown in Scotland. They are discussed by Macdonald (1932, 300–1) who regarded them as typical of the Antonine occupation. An example from Leicester came from a level dated to c 200 AD (Kenyon, 1947, fig 87, 6). Some of the later mirror symbols look more like paterae or ladles than mirrors. Such ladles are known from Early Christian period sites in Ireland (Laing 1975a, fig 103, no 12 – which can be compared with the symbol on the stone from Inveravon), the most recently discovered example being in the Derrynavlan hoard.

The 'swimming elephant' has of course good Roman prototypes, as was pointed out by Thomas (1961, 51–3). Thomas also suggested that the symbol represented on the Walton, Fife, stone was a Donside terret (1961, pl II). Donside terrets are very difficult to date, and it has been suggested that they are of the 5th century, on account of the fact that the only certain association of one with another object was with a bobble-headed pin at Crichtie, Aberdeens, a type of pin generally regarded as post-Roman. On the strength of this, Alcock was inclined to date the Donside terrets to the 4th–5th centuries (1963, 177), a date which would not conflict with the fact that terrets have been found on Roman sites, notably Chesters on Hadrian's Wall (Clayton 1903, pl 3, following p 102). That they had a fairly long currency is shown by their typological development (Kilbride-Jones 1935).

If Thomas is correct in believing that some symbols represent swords (1961, 52–3), these are surely Roman swords, not Iron Age as he suggested, or post-Roman: they have the circular pommel of a Roman *gladius*.

Finally, the immediate inspiration for the animal symbols may be found again in Romano-British art, and prototypes for many of them are to be seen in Roman-British sculpture, notably for the eagle and boar, both military badges.

#### THE ROMANIZATION OF THE PICTS

If we are correct in supposing that late Roman influence contributed to the development of the Pictish symbols, in what context could this have occurred? There are two possibilities. Either it came about during the period of the Roman military occupation of Scotland, or it happened in the 4th/5th centuries, when official Roman involvement with Scotland was minimal.

Correctly speaking, the Picts do not exist until they are first named by Roman writers, which happens in a panegyric dated to AD 297. Nevertheless, it is not seriously doubted that the Picts were not newcomers but a confederation of tribes who are known by other names in earlier authors, notably as the *Caledonii* and *Maeatae*. The historical Picts represent an amalgam of two

confederacies (still distinguished as *Dicalydones* and *Verturiones* in the 4th century), which John Mann has seen as coming into being as a result of Roman pressure (Mann 1974). In later times the Irish and Gaelic name for the Picts was *Cruithni* or *Cruithentuath*, while in Welsh literature they are known as *Prydyn* or *Pryden*, which Chadwick noted was related to *Britannia* (1949, 66–8). In discussing the form of the name, Chadwick pointed out that on an altar found in the foundations of Hexham Abbey the inscription refers to *Q Calpurnius Concessinus*, ‘commander of the cavalry’ who ‘slaughtered a band of Corionototae’ (Chadwick 1949, 71). Chadwick believed *Corionototae* to be the same in essence as *Cruithentuath*, and that the altar records a Pictish expedition in the late 2nd or 3rd century.

At the time of the Roman military occupation in Scotland the immediate ancestors of the Picts were occupying brochs, souterrains and duns. These enjoy a distribution which compares closely with that of the later Pictish stones, with few examples to be found south of the Forth-Clyde line. David Breeze, in discussing the occurrence of Roman material on these sites, has suggested, very reasonably, that the large number of Roman finds from them is indicative of trade rather than plunder (1982, 142). He has also suggested that the occurrence of duns, brochs and possibly souterrains in southern Scotland may be the outcome of a spread of northern peoples (ie proto-Picts) into southern Scotland following the turmoil that afflicted the Roman army in the early 180s or late 190s (Breeze 1982, 144).

In support of the view that the Pictish king-lists are not totally mythical in their earlier sections, Morris has pointed out that an early 3rd-century Roman inscription (*RIB* 191) refers to *Lossio Veda . . . nepos Vepogeni, Caledo*, a name which can be equated with *Vepoguenech*, who appears as seventeenth in the Pictish king lists (Morris 1975, 186; for king-list, Chadwick 1949, 7 & 32). Morris reckoned that were the king-lists historical, *Vepoguenech* would have been a 3rd-century ruler.

In such a context, it is possible to envisage proto-Picts borrowing motifs from Roman art, but it is not convincing. Why, having borrowed them, should they not have immediately started employing them on their monuments (unless these were in wood until the 4th or 5th century)?

The likeliest contest lies in the 4th/5th century, and to this period we must now turn.

The key to the Romanization of western and northern Britain probably lies in the administrative changes that took place in Britannia at the end of the Roman period. This was first discussed by Chadwick and has been extensively dealt with by Morris and more recently (and cautiously) by Johnson, and need not be repeated here (Chadwick 1949, 150; Morris 1975, 16–18; Johnson 1980, chapter 1). In essence, however, it would appear that in Wales, the South-West peninsula and southern Scotland administrations were set up under *praefecti gentium* or similar officials, and from these administrations the later kingdoms of the Early Christian period evolved. The rulers of these kingdoms traced their lines back to men with Roman names and with Roman titles, and regarded themselves as the successors of Roman officials. The memorial stones of the 5th and 6th centuries record men with Roman names and titles (for this see Laing 1979, 131).

In what is now southern Scotland the archaeological evidence for Roman influence in the Dark Age kingdoms is difficult to assess. Without entering into the controversy that surrounds St Ninian, it seems reasonable to say that the latter was probably sent out from Carlisle to administer an existing Christian community of Roman origins in the Whithorn area (Thomas 1968, 199; Thomas 1981, chapter 11). The recent radiocarbon dating for the long-cist cemetery with its memorial stone – the Catstane – at Kirkliston, Midlothian, might suggest a Christian community on the Forth as early as the beginning of the 5th century AD (Cowie 1978, 199). The distribution of long-cist cemeteries in southern Scotland is interesting and informative. They have recently been plotted by Hope-Taylor (1979, fig 111). They enjoy a dense concentration along the

east coastal strip, with a scatter northwards into Fife and Tayside. Their distribution coincides mainly with the area which in the Early Christian period was known as that of the Gododdin, the focus of which was Traprain Law in East Lothian (for the *Votadini* ('Venedotians') and *Gododdin*, see Morris 1975, 66g and 214f). The same area had produced other evidence for early Christianity – the stone from Yarrowkirk, Selkirk, which dates from the early 6th century, indicates that in the late 5th men still had names that were Roman (the father of the two men commemorated was called *Liberalis* (RCAMS 1957, 174)). If the Kirkliston date can be accepted, then the evidence suggests a strong Christian tradition in Gododdin in the 5th to 6th century, which must be explained in terms of Romano-British influence.

Traprain Law is well-known for having produced considerable evidence of Romanization in the centuries of Roman rule in Britain: it appears to have been allowed certain privileges in return for its continuing friendship with Roman Authority. In this connection it has been suggested that the Traprain Treasure was not loot, as commonly supposed, but a diplomatic gift (discussed by Alcock, with refs, 1979, 115). In this context, too, the belt buckle from Traprain of Romano-Germanic type which belongs to series of bronze mounted belts which denote status – *cingula* – is perhaps indicative of the presence there of an official sent out by Theodosius. The evidence of this and the related silver buckles from the Traprain Treasure have recently been discussed by Alcock (1979, 135) and need not be discussed further here. These buckles are, however, perhaps some evidence for the *praefecti gentium* postulated by Morris (Morris 1975, 122) which have recently been disputed (for summary, Thomas 1981, 278), and for the view that the migration of Cunedda to North Wales in the 5th century was the outcome of continuing Roman policy of moving federates around for purposes of defence even as late as the 5th century (Morris 1975, 66; Nicholson 1908; Alcock 1971, 125–9, but see Smyth 1984, 15).

Hope-Taylor plotted, but did not comment on, the heavy silver chains that have been found in south-east Scotland. These are usually regarded as Pictish, since some of them carry Pictish symbols. There are 10 such chains, nearly all from south of the Forth-Clyde line (Edwards 1939 provides a list). The chains, however, appear to have been made from Roman parcel-gilt melted down (Stevenson 1956), and it seems not impossible that they were in fact originally produced south of the Forth but that the type was later taken up in Pictland. One is from Traprain Law itself. They recall the insignia worn by officers in the late Roman army – could these too be the regalia of late Roman officials in the frontier areas of Britain?

In purely archaeological terms, it is very difficult to point to surviving Roman traditions in southern Scotland in the 5th century. In his recent discussion of timber halls at Yeavinger, Northumberland, however, Brian Hope-Taylor has argued that these represent in part a survival of native tradition, and has discussed the possible influence of Romano-British building traditions upon them (Hope-Taylor 1979, 232–7). In southern Scotland, there are two excavated sites with halls – Doon Hill, East Lothian (Hope-Taylor 1966), and Kirkconnel, Waterbeck, Dumfries, (Laing & Clough 1969). Hope-Taylor has argued that the first hall at Doon Hill was purely British, and if that is so, the only possible explanation for its form seems to be a Romano-British legacy. In connection with Kirkconnel, LRL discussed the whole problem of timber halls in post-Roman Britain (Laing 1969). A further, unexcavated example of such a hall has been recorded by aerial photography in Peeblesshire, at Hoggbridge (RCAMS 1967, 36 & 79), and the probable hall at Dalry, Ayrshire, could be considered in this connection (Cochran-Patrick 1874; Laing 1969, 113–14).

In terms of material equipment, only one site has produced a range of finds and a series of 5th-century radiocarbon dates, that of the Mote of Mark, Kirkcudbright. The Mote of Mark was occupied certainly in the 6th century as well as the 5th, and it is difficult to be certain in the case

of the finds from the 1913 excavations to what occupation phase particular objects belong. Nevertheless, the assemblage as a whole is remarkably uniform, and similar in many respects to that of Garranes, Co Cork. The 5th-century and later site of Dumbarton Rock, Strathclyde (Alcock 1976) has produced too few finds to be diagnostic, but certainly by the later 6th century southern Scotland possessed a Romanized culture as is shown by the finds from Buston crannog Ayrshire (Munro 1882, 191–239). In the Mote of Mark assemblage, some of the objects are of undoubtedly Romano-British origin, and the techniques used in the metalworking betray a direct legacy from a Roman past (Swindells and Laing 1979). On the Mote of Mark evidence, it seems extremely probable that a culture derivative of Roman Britain was current in southern Scotland in the 5th/6th centuries, and this would fit in with the evidence we have here considered.

There is one final piece of evidence. In his *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* St Patrick accuses them of not behaving like Roman citizens (*Epistola*, 2). If this Coroticus is, as is usually accepted, a king of Strathclyde in the 5th century (Thomas 1981, 342), then the jibe would be meaningless unless the soldiers regarded themselves as Roman citizens. Indeed, the whole of Patrick's letter would have no meaning except in a society in which some semblance of Roman tradition was still being maintained.

There is some evidence, then, for the survival of Romano-British traditions in southern Scotland in the 5th century. In what context could the Picts have come into contact with them? Charles Thomas has recently discussed the possibility that Pictland extended south of the Forth-Clyde line at some point in the 5th to 7th centuries (Thomas 1981, 288–90). His arguments need not be repeated here, and rest on the occurrence of *pit* placenames, Class I symbol stones, and the massive silver chains in southern Scotland. It has already been suggested that the massive silver chains may be in origin British, but they could well have been taken up by the Picts during their period of activity south of the Forth–Clyde. Thomas has suggested that the focus of such a Pictish enclave may have been West Lothian or Linlithgow (1981, 290) – near the latter, at Binney Craig, was found a stone cup with a Pictish-looking beast on its handle (Thomas 1961, 21, fig 4).

It remains to seek other hints of Romano-British influence in Pictish culture. This is most clearly seen in metalwork. That the Picts manufactured hanging-bowls cannot be doubted (Laing 1974, 194–5). One of the types known to have been produced by the Picts is Longley's Class 1, with openwork double pelta pattern escutcheons. There is a mould for one from Craig Phadrig, Inverness, and it is this type of bowl that is represented in the Tummel Bridge and Castle Tioram hoards. It has been argued that this class of hanging bowl should be dated to the 5th century, and that the occurrence of bowls of this type in eastern England should be taken along with the similar incidence of penannular brooches of Class H as evidence for Pictish contact with the south in this period (Longley 1975, 32–3). It is now also clear that Longley's type 1 hanging bowls originated out of late Roman antecedents, and he has suggested quite convincingly that these bowls developed in the late 4th century in the south and were transmitted to Pictland as part of a two-way traffic which bought Pictish brooches to the south (Longley 1975, 32).

Further evidence for such a two-way traffic in ideas might be found in the presence in Orkney of a buckle copying a type of late Roman product manufactured on the continent but imported in small numbers to southern and eastern England in the 4th/5th centuries (Laing 1974, 189).

Similarly originating in late Roman Britain are the various classes of penannular brooch with zoomorphic terminals. Mention has already been made of the Class H brooches, which Longley has argued have a Scottish ancestry (1975, 10). Also found in Pictland, in Orkney, are examples of F brooches. It is impossible to say where F brooches originated, but they certainly

developed out of the Romano-British E brooches in the 4th/5th centuries, and a North British origin centre has been suggested for them (Longley 1975, 8). The Class E prototypes are also found in the Northern Isles, but with the exception of a single brooch from Barnton, Midlothian, are not found elsewhere in Scotland. There are examples from Hadrian's Wall and its supply forts, and from Roman sites further south. In all cases where the provenance is clear and the context can be dated they are attributed to the 4th century (usually late) (see list in Fowler 1963, 135–7), and it is therefore unlikely that the brooches from the Northern Isles reached there before the period of Pictish raids in the late 4th century. They are most readily explained in terms of objects which reached the Northern Isles as a result of Pictish activities further south.

Of Romano-British origin too are the curious animal heads that are a feature of 5th- and 6th-century metalwork and which occur in Pictland. LRL has discussed this phenomenon elsewhere (1974, 189–93), and in particular the heads' presence on a series of swivel rings. Since that publication, we have been convinced that some may post-date the Pictish period, but some at least belong to it, as Stevenson had independently argued (1976, 250). For a Roman prototype, one need look no further than the finger-rings in the Thetford, Norfolk, hoard (Johns & Potter 1983, no 5).

As long ago as 1955 Stevenson advanced the view that the hipped stick pins found in northern Scotland were of Roman ancestry, and argued further that the Scottish series of ball, nail, bead and vase headed pins were descendants of Romano-British models (1955a, 283–5). In the discussion of Dark Age stick pins LRL ventured to suggest that as a type stick pins are a legacy from Roman Britain, and discussed the various forms found in Pictland (Laing 1975b). The arguments about the Roman origin of some of the objects in the Norrie's Law hoard have already been set out. Stevenson has also shown that Roman silver was the source of the raw material for other Pictish silverwork, such as the massive silver chains (1956).

Apart from metalwork, there is perhaps some evidence of Roman influence in building traditions in Pictland. This takes the form of the use of nails in timber construction, which is apparent at Burghead, Moray (Young 1891) and Dundurn, Perth (Alcock 1977, 3).

From the above, it can be seen that there is evidence for some survival of Romano-British cultural traditions in southern Scotland, and for certain elements of Romano-British derivation in Pictish culture, apart from Class I symbols. It has also been demonstrated that a possible context for the spread of such cultural traits to Pictland is provided by Pictish activity in southern Scotland. If it is argued that the Picts acquired cultural attributes with Romano-British origins simply through sharing a common material culture with their Celtic contemporaries, this does not in any way disprove that in the same context Romano-British motifs could not also have been disseminated. The evidence is far from conclusive, but what there is does not disprove a Romano-British ancestry for the Pictish symbols.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our special thanks are due to Mr David Longley who redrew our figures for publication.

#### REFERENCES

- Alcock, L 1965 *Dinas Powys, an Iron Age, Dark Age and Early Medieval Settlement in Glamorgan*. Cardiff.
- Alcock, L 1971 *Arthur's Britain*. London.
- Alcock, L 1976 'A multi-disciplinary chronology for Alt Clut, Castle Rock, Dumbarton', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 107 (1977–8), 103–13.
- Alcock, L 1977 *Excavations at Dundurn, St Fillans, Perthshire, 1976–7*. Glasgow.

- Alcock, L 1979 'The North Britons, the Picts and the Scots', in Casey, P J (ed), *The End of Roman Britain*, Oxford, 134–42. (= *Brit Archaeol Rep*, 71.)
- Anderson, J 1880 *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, 2 Ser. Edinburgh.
- Anderson, J & Allen, J R 1903 *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*. Edinburgh.
- Armstrong, E C R 1922 'Irish bronze pins of the Christian period', *Archaeologia*, 72, (1921–2), 71–86.
- Bailey, R N 1980 *Viking Age Sculpture*. London.
- Baldwin-Brown, G 1915 *The Arts in Early England*. IV *Saxon Art and Industry in the Pagan Period*. London.
- Birley, R 1977 *Vindolanda*. London.
- Brailsford, J 1958 *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*. London.
- Breeze, D J 1982 *The Northern Frontiers of Roman Britain*. London.
- Bushe-Fox, J P 1913 *Excavations at Wroxeter*. London (= *Rep Res Com Soc Antiq Lond*, 1.)
- Bushe-Fox, J P 1932 *Third Report on the Excavations of the Roman fort at Richborough, Kent*. London. (= *Rep Res Comm Soc Antiq Lond*, 10.)
- Chadwick, H M 1949 *Early Scotland*. Cambridge.
- Clayton, J 1903 *Account of the Roman Antiquities preserved in the Museum at Chesters*. London.
- Cochran-Patrick, R W 1874 'Notes on some explorations in a tumulus called the Court Hill, Dalry, Ayrshire', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 10 (1874), 281–5.
- Cowie, T G 1978 'Excavations at the Catstane, Midlothian, 1977', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 109 (1977–8), 166–201.
- Edwards, A J H 1939 'A massive double-linked silver chain', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 73 (1938–9), 326–7.
- Fowler, Elizabeth 1963 'Celtic Metalwork of the fifth and sixth centuries AD', *Archaeol J*, 120 (1963), 98–160.
- Fox, C 1958 *Pattern and Purpose*. Cardiff.
- Hawkes, Sonia C & Dunning, G C 1961 'Soldiers and Settlers in Britain, fourth to fifth century', *Medieval Archaeol*, 5 (1961), 1–70.
- Hencken, H O'N 1950 'Lagore Crannog, A Royal Residence of the Seventh to Tenth Centuries AD', *Proc Roy Irish Acad*, 53 (1950), 1–247.
- Henderson, Isobel 1958 'The Origin Centre of the Pictish symbol stones', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 95 (1957–8), 44–60.
- Henderson, Isobel 1967 *The Picts*. London.
- Henderson, Isobel 1982 'Pictish Art and the Book of Kells' in Whitlock, D et al (eds), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, Cambridge, 79–105.
- Henry, Françoise 1952 'A Wooden hut at Inishkea North, Co Mayo', *J Roy Soc Antiq Ireland*, 82 (1952), 163–78.
- Henry, Françoise 1956 *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period to AD 800*. London.
- Hope-Taylor, B 1966 'Doon Hill', *Medieval Archaeol*, 10 (1966), 176–7.
- Hope-Taylor, B 1979 *Yeavinger, an Anglo-British Centre of early Northumbria*, London.
- Jacobsthal, P 1944 *Early Celtic Art*. Oxford.
- Johns, Catherine 1974 'A Roman silver pin from Oldcroft, Glos', *Antiq J*, 54 (1974), 295–7.
- Johns, Catherine N & Potter, T 1983 *The Thetford Treasure*. London.
- Johnson, S 1980 *Later Roman Britain*. London.
- Kenyon, Kathleen 1948 *The Jewry Wall Site, Leicester*, London. (= *Rep Res Comm Soc Antiq Lond*, 15.)
- Kilbride-Jones, H E 1935 'A bronze terret from Rhynie and the distribution of the type', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 69 (1934–5), 448–54.
- Laing, L R 1969 'Timber halls in Dark Age British – some problems', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 46 (1969), 110–27.
- Laing, L R 1973 'People and Pins in Dark Age Scotland', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 5 (1973), 53–71.
- Laing, L R 1974 'Picts Saxons and Celtic Metalwork', *Proc Soc Antiq Soc*, 105 (1972–4), 189–99.
- Laing, L R 1975a *The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain and Ireland, c 400–1200 AD*. London.
- Laing, L A 1975b 'People and Pins in Dark Age Scotland', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 50 (1975), 37–52.

- Laing, L R 1977 'Segontium and the Post-Roman Occupation of Wales', in Laing, L (ed), *Studies in Celtic Survival*, Oxford, 57–60. (= *Brit Archaeol Rep*, 37.)
- Laing, L R 1979 *Celtic Britain*. London.
- Laing, L R & Clough, T H McK 1969 'Excavations at Kirkconnel, Waterbeck, Dumfriesshire, 1968', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 46 (1968), 129–39.
- Leeds, E T 1912 'The distribution of the saucer brooch in relation to the battle of Bedford, AD 571', *Archaeologia*, 63 (1912), 159–202.
- Liversidge, Joan 1973 *Britain in the Roman Empire*. London.
- Lloyd-Morgan, Glenys 1980 'Roman mirrors and Pictish symbol: a note on trade and contact', in Hanson, W S & Keppie, L J (eds), *Roman Frontier* (= *Brit Archaeol Rep Int Ser*, 71.)
- Longley, D 1975 *Hanging bowls, penannular brooches and the Anglo-Saxon Connexion*. Oxford. (= *British Archaeol Rep*, 22.)
- Macdonald, G 1932 'An Inventory of objects of Roman and provincial Roman origin found on sites in Scotland', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 66 (1931–2), 277–400.
- Macgregor, A 1974 'The Broch of Burrian, North Ronaldsay, Orkney', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972–4), 63–118.
- Macgregor, A 1975 'Barred combs of Frisian type in England', *Medieval Archaeol*, 19 (1975), 195–8.
- MacKie, E 1970 'The Scottish Iron Age', *Scot Hist Rev*, 19 (1974), 1–32.
- Mann, J 1974 'The Northern Frontier after AD 367', *Glasgow Archaeol J*, 3, (1974), 34–42.
- Megaw, J V S 1970 *The Elusive Image, the Art of the European Iron Age*. Bath.
- Minns, E 1944 *The Art of the Northern Nomads*.
- Morris, J R 1975 *The Age of Arthur*, 2 ed. London.
- Munro, R 1882 *Ancient Scottish Lake Dwellings*. Edinburgh.
- Nicholson, E W 1908 'The Dynasty of Cunedag', *Y Cymmrodor*, 21 (1908), 63–105.
- Painter, K 1977 *The Water Newton Early Christian Silver*. London.
- Ritchie, Anna 1977 'Excavation of a Pictish and Viking-age farmsteads at Buckquoy, Orkney', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 108 (1976–7), 174–227.
- RCAMS 1957 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Selkirkshire*. Edinburgh.
- RCAMS 1967 *Inventory of Peebles-shire*. Edinburgh.
- Ross, Anne 1974 *Pagan Celtic Britain*. London.
- Smyth, A P 1984 *Warlords and Holy Men*. London.
- Stevenson, R B K 1955a 'Pins and the Chronology of the brochs', *Proc Prehist Soc*, 21 (1955), 282–94.
- Stevenson, R B K 1955b 'Pictish Art', in Wainwright, F T (ed), *Problem of the Picts*, Edinburgh, 97–128.
- Stevenson, R B K 1956 'Pictish chains, Roman silver and bauxite beads', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 88 (1954–6), 228–30.
- Stevenson, R B K 1964 'The Gaulcross Hoard of Pictish Silver', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 97 (1963–4), 206–11.
- Stevenson, R B K 1970 'Sculpture in Scotland in the 6th–9th centuries AD', *Kolloquium über spatantike und frühmittelalterliche skulptur*, Mainz, 64–74.
- Stevenson, R B K 1976 'The Earlier metalwork of Pictland', in Megaw, J V S (ed), *To Illustrate the Monuments*, London, 246–51.
- Swindells, N & Laing, L 1979 'Metalworking at the Mote of Mark in the 6th–7th centuries AD', in Oddy, W (ed), *Aspects of Early Metallurgy*, London, 121–8.
- Thomas, A C 1961 'Animal Art of the Scottish Iron Age', *Archaeol J*, 118 (1961), 14–64.
- Thomas, A C 1963 'The Interpretation of the Pictish symbols', *Archaeol J*, 120 (1963), 31–64.
- Thomas, A C 1968 'The Evidence from North Britain,' in Barley, M & Hanson, R P C (eds), *Christianity in Britain 300–700*, Leicester, 93–122.
- Thomas, A C 1981 *Christianity in Roman Britain, to AD 500*. London.
- Thompson, F H 1978 'The Zoomorphic *Pelta* in Romano-British art', *Antiq J*, 48 (1978), 47–58.
- Toynbee, J M C 1963 *Art in Roman Britain*. London.
- Toynbee, J M C 1968 'Pagan motifs and practices in Christian art and ritual in Roman Britain', in Barley, M & Hanson, R P C (eds), *Christianity in Britain 300–700*, Leicester, 177–92.

- Wheeler, R E M 1923 *Segontium and the Roman Occupation of Wales*. (= *Y Cymmrodor*, 33.)
- Wheeler, R E M & Wheeler, T V 1932 *The Prehistoric, Roman and Post-Roman site at Lydney Park, Glos*. London. (= *Rep Res Comm Soc Antiq Lond*, 9.)
- Young, Alison 1956 'Excavations at Dun Cuier, Isle of Barra', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 89 (1955-6), 290-328.
- Young, H 1891 'Notes on the ramparts of Burghead as revealed by recent excavations', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 25 (1891), 435-7.