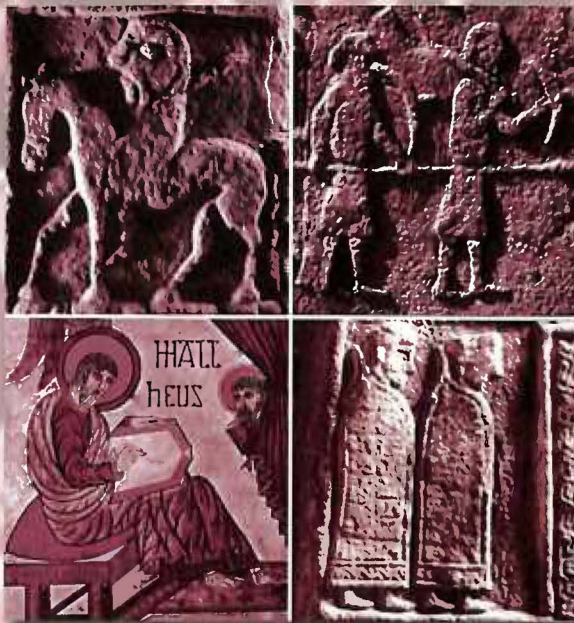
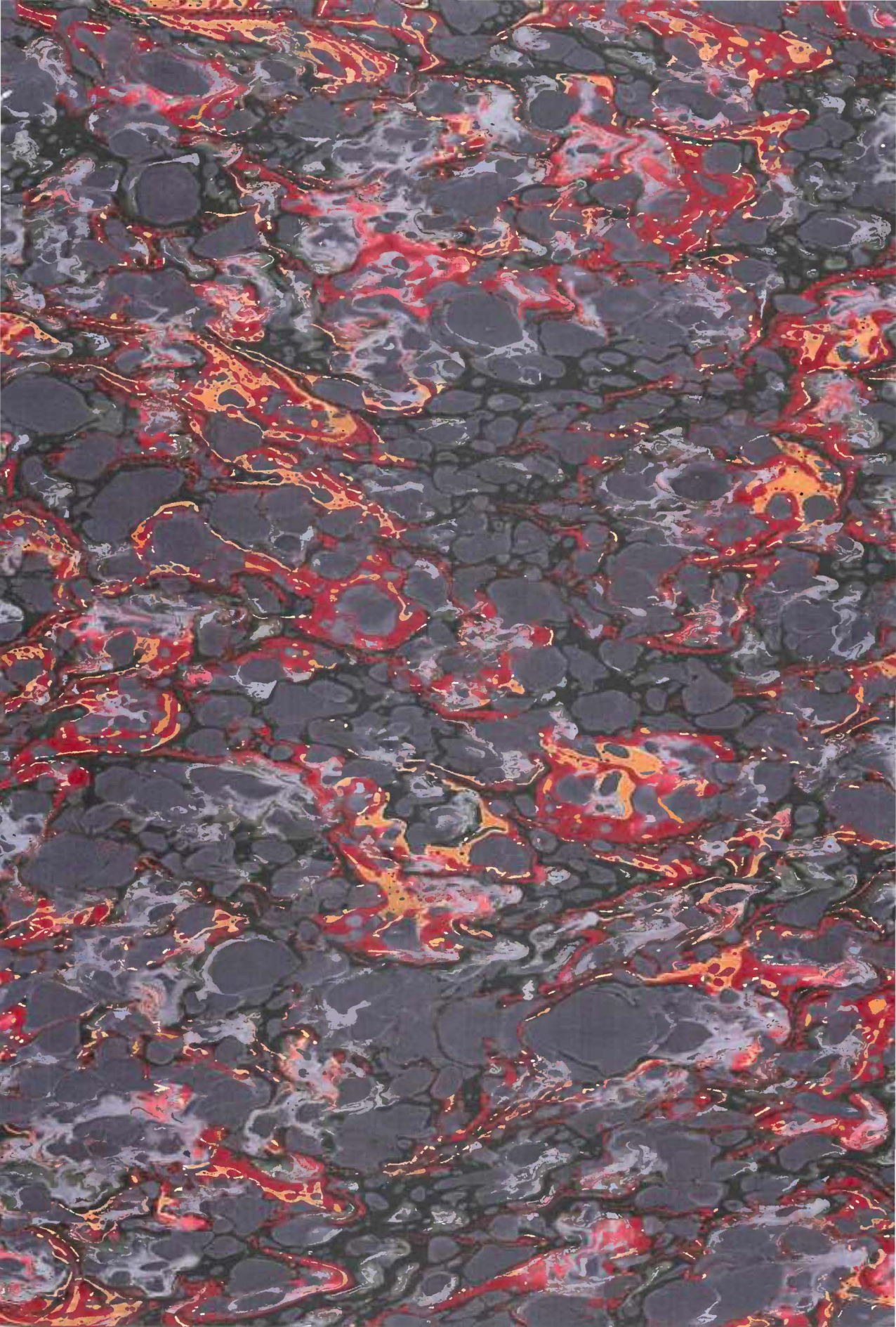


# KINGS & WARRIORS CRAFTSMEN & PRIESTS

IN NORTHERN BRITAIN AD 550-850



LESLIE ALCOCK



Kings and warriors, craftsmen and priests

---

Leslie Alcock

Dedicated  
to the treasured memory of

ELIZABETH A ALCOCK (née Blair)  
1923-1998

Companion, Collaborator, Critic

without whom this work could never have been  
conceived or completed

KINGS AND WARRIORS,  
CRAFTSMEN AND PRIESTS  
in Northern Britain AD 550-850

---

LESLIE ALCOCK

illustration  
Sylvia Stevenson

SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND

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*Editor* ALEXANDRA SHEPHERD

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Front: king, from the Dupplin Cross (*Historic Scotland*); warriors, from the Aberlemno  
Churchyard stone (*Historic Scotland*); craftsmen, Matthew as scribe from the Lindisfarne  
Gospels (*British Library*); and priests, from the Fowls Wester cross-slab.  
Back: the Hunterston brooch (*National Museums of Scotland*).

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The origins of this work lie in the generous invitation from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland to deliver the Society's Rhind Lectures in the session 1988-89. For this prestigious series of six lectures, I chose a theme which had informed much of my thinking and research over some decades: 'An Heroic Age: war and society in Northern Britain AD 450-850'. A synopsis of the Lectures was printed in the Society's *Proceedings* for 1988, 327-34. From the start, however, it had been my intention to write an expanded account of the Lectures in keeping with the best tradition of the Rhind series; but I recognized a primary obligation to complete reports on my earlier excavations in both south-west England and Scotland.

It was not until 1995 that I could turn my whole attention to the Rhind Lectures. In the interim, I had occasionally pondered the full implications of my original—somewhat pretentious—title. The term 'Heroic Age' in itself called up images of the battle poetry of the Cymry, the Irish, and the Anglo-Saxons (that of the Picts having been lost); and of the setting of the royal halls in which the poetry had been declaimed to the accompaniment of lyres and harps, as well as images of feasting and drinking; and of the reciprocal social obligations between kings and their followers. These obligations included the giving of jewellery of varied richness, so that the objects in themselves, and their social significance, all called for a fuller treatment.

Other lectures in the series had dealt—in very summary terms—with the fortifications of the period; with royal centres of power, and the interpretations of the Latin terms by which they are mentioned in the contemporary documents; with the social and intellectual significance of the introduction of Christianity in northern Britain; and with sculptured images of men and beasts, principally among the Picts. Each of these lectures needed to be expanded into several chapters, and the whole work also demanded some discussion of the physical setting which provided both the opportunities and the constraints on the activities of the Heroic Age. As the list of contents records, the six lectures grew inexorably reaching more than twenty chapters.

A brief comment is needed here on the title of this expanded work compared with that of the original lectures. They had proposed the chronological bracket of AD 450-850. The terminal date remains sound, but the initial date has been advanced from 450 to 550. This is because, over the past decade, I have revised my views on the possibility of writing reliable history in Britain in the 5th and early 6th centuries. Indeed, a cautious view might start British history in AD 597, with the arrival of the Roman Christian mission of St Augustine in Kent. I have found it convenient, however, to refer—rather hesitantly—to events in the second half of the 6th century.

Secondly, rejecting the traditional usage of the term 'Northern Britain' as a synonym for 'Scotland', I have maintained the inclusion of northern Northumbria within the term; indeed I have extended it south of the Tyne to the Tees, thereby including the whole of Bernicia. In terms of political geography, this is justified because, over the period of this

survey, Northumbria did indeed extend to the Forth estuary on the east, as well as over much of south-western Scotland. A further reason in terms of this survey is that, in both social history and archaeology, very interesting comparisons can be made between Northumbria and the kingdoms to the north.

The omission of the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles is the result of deliberation, not oversight. Visits going back to 1947 have convinced me of the rich variety of Early Medieval structures and artefacts in both areas; but it is a variety which (with rare exceptions mentioned in the text) differs in various degrees from the mainland and the Inner Hebrides: to have included them would have made a necessarily complicated account even more so.



At this point I should also add some comments originally written as part of the Envoi to this volume but considered by the Editor to sit more happily here. It had seemed to me appropriate to provide some brief comments – an apologia – on the heavy weighting of history in an otherwise principally archaeological treatise.

I must begin with the statement that my academic upbringing was wholly within the idiosyncratic Oxford school of Modern (as opposed to Classical) English History: that is, beginning with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. For me, the highlight was a rigorous study of the documents of medieval agrarian economy and its social background. My archaeological training was picked up at the point of a trowel, mostly at Dorchester (Oxon), Sabratha, Tripolitania, and Mohenjodaro, Pakistan. Surprisingly, this was considered adequate for my appointment to the first full-time lectureship in University College, Cardiff.

At Cardiff, my first excavation was of a small promontory fort at Dinas Powys, Glamorgan. Superficially, this was a site of the Iron Age, chosen because there was already an established background suitable for an apprenticeship. By a striking instance of serendipity, Dinas Powys was in fact rich in relics of the 5th to 8th centuries AD, as is now well known to all Insular Early Medieval scholars. The range of artefacts demanded interpretations in economic and social terms. The resulting report on Dinas Powys set the pattern for my future archaeological research and writing.

A further enrichment of my interpretations came from Early Welsh literature, especially because at that time, several translations and commentaries were available in English. These enhanced my interpretations of Insular Celtic society in both subjective and objective terms, especially from battle poetry and law-tracts. These wider areas very fruitfully echoed aspects of my Oxford training.

In the following decades, I pursued aspects of archaeology and social history, in its widest terms, in Wales, south-west England, and above all, from 1973, in Scotland and northern England. Apart from excavation reports and minor discussion articles, I published a major collection of essays as *Economy, Society and Warfare among the Britons and Saxons* (1987). This in a sense bridges the span between *Dinas Powys* (1963) and the present book. The opportunity for that springs obviously from my freedom from the shackles of teaching and administration.



These paragraphs, and a glance at the list of contents, will show the wide spread of topics which are indeed discussed. What I do not attempt to claim, however, is that the information and discussions are totally up-to-date. Indeed, given the ever-increasing number of excavations, artefactual studies, and scientific analyses, together with—as it seems—the ever-increasing delays in final reports (as opposed to skimpy interims), a claim to being up-to-date would necessarily be false. To give a striking example of the problem: as I wrote this Preface, I received a bookseller's flyer listing six major books highly relevant to my period, all of them published in early 1999.

Conscious of the limitations of this survey, I take comfort from the preface of a major scholar in a neighbouring field: 'In any field of synthesis much detail has to be omitted, many statements elided: I am aware that the omissions will not please everybody, and that some will treat my elisions with contumely, but I hope that I have provided for the layman and student alike an introduction to the present state of study' (David M Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, 1984, 7).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The preface is the proper place to thank all those organisations and individuals who contributed in various ways towards the research and writing of this work. Firstly I must acknowledge generous grants from the Hunter Archaeological Trust, the Russell Trust through Mrs Cecilia Croal, and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. My former Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, provided valuable technical facilities. Of individuals, special mention should be made of Sylvia Stevenson, whose skill and patience in interpreting my embryonic drawings created the main body of the line drawings; and of Alexandra Shepherd, Editor of the Society's Monograph Series, whose guidance and encouragement contributed much to the final volume.

The fellow scholars who contributed so readily from their store of knowledge were legion. I thank them sincerely, if anonymously. I hope that it will not be thought churlish if I refer to their names in the bibliography and the credits for illustrations.

Finally, as an act of piety, I must record the names of five scholars, all alas now deceased, who guided and encouraged me over many decades. RFI Bunn, Senior History master, Manchester Grammar School, who first taught me that history is to be found in sources, not in history books, and that the history of culture is as important as that of politics; Stanley Cohn, History Tutor, Brasenose College, Oxford, who introduced me to the documents of medieval agrarian economy; Richard Atkinson, then at the Ashmolean Museum, who trained me in the theory and techniques of archaeological excavation; Mortimer Wheeler, who guided me in the managerial skills of large-scale excavation; and finally, Robert Stevenson, Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, who from the mid-1950s fostered in my wife and myself our dedication to the 'Dark Age' or Early Medieval archaeology of mainland Scotland. I can still trace their several influences through the chapters of this book.

Leslie Alcock  
September 2001

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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- AU* Mac Airt, S & Mac Niocaill, G 1983 *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)*, Dublin
- Atlas* van der Meer, F & Mohrman, C 1958 *Atlas of the early Christian world*, trans & ed Hedlund, MF & Rowley, HH, Amsterdam/London
- BD* Williams, A, Smyth, AP & Kirby, DP (eds) 1991 *A biographical dictionary of Dark Age Britain*, London
- Beowulf* Hall, JRC (trans) 1950 *Beowulf and the Finnesburg fragment*, revised by CL Wrenn, London; cited by lines; also Bradley, S AJ (trans) 1982 *Anglo-Saxon poetry*, London
- DEB* Gildas, *De excidio Britonum*, see Winterbottom 1978
- DES* *Discovery & excavation in Scotland*, Council for Scottish Archaeology, published annually
- Encyclopedia* Di Berardino, A (ed) 1992 *Encyclopedia of the early church* (English version), Cambridge
- ECMW* *Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (followed by number of individual monument), Nash-Williams, 1950. Cardiff.
- ECMS* *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, Allen, JR & Anderson, J, 1903. Edinburgh: Soc Antiq Scot. Reprint with additional material, 1993. Balgavies, Forfar, Angus: Pinkfoot Press.
- EHD* *English Historical Documents, Vol I c.500-1042*, Whitelock, D, 1979. 2 edn. London
- HB* Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, see Morris 1980
- HE* *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, see Colgrave & Mynors (eds) 1969
- Mabinogion* Jones, G & Jones, T 1949 *The Mabinogion*, London
- PT* *The poems of Taliesin*, English version, Williams, I & Williams JEC (eds), Dublin 1968
- VBA* *Vita Beatorum Abbatum*, see Farmer, DH, 1983 (translation); Plummer, C, 1896 (text)
- VC* Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, Anderson, AO & Anderson, MO (ed & trans), 1961. Edinburgh. Revised edn, 1991, MO Anderson. Oxford.
- VCA* *Vita Sancti Cuthberti auctore anonymo*, see Colgrave, B, 1940; 1985
- VCB* *Beda's vita Sancti Cuthberti*, see Colgrave, B (ed and trans), 1940
- VG* *Felix's Life of St Guthlac*, see Colgrave, B (ed and trans), 1956
- VP* *St Patrick: his writings and Muirchu's Life*, see Hood, ABE, 1978
- VW* *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, see Colgrave, B, 1927
- YG* *Y Gododdin* Jarman, AOH, 1988 *Aneirin: Y Gododdin*, Llandysul, Gomer Press

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## NOTES TO THE VOLUME

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- The term 'Insular' is used throughout to indicate 'pertaining to the British Isles' but also more specifically in the art historic context to indicate the unique art form produced by the blend of cultural influences at work within these islands during the period of this volume.
- The term 'Early Historic' is preferred for this period to the more ambivalent 'Early medieval'.
- The references in the text are listed as usual at the end of the volume. Where a number of editions or impressions of a volume exist, the edition used by the author is cited in the text and indicated in the references – additional dates of publication with identical pagination are indicated in brackets. Reprints/facsimiles are listed at the end of the entry. Reprints with additional material or under an editor are given a separate entry.
- Throughout the most commonly used form of names is utilised (eg Kenneth son of Alpín) but Gaelic equivalents are listed in the index.
- Where an individual, site or theme is first introduced, a date bracket, explanatory description or definition is included at that point. To avoid extensive repetition for subsequent explanation these are cited in the index and the reader is referred there for further clarification (eg 'Edwin, king of Northumbria AD [dates]', thereafter simply 'Edwin' or 'Edwin of Northumbria'). Dates will be regnal dates, floruit or in some cases simply death dates indicating location within a specific century.
- The volume refers almost exclusively to the centuries AD. The prefix AD is added to the initial date within each paragraph: thereafter all dates are AD unless BC is specifically stated.



Frontispiece  
Eassie, Angus,  
cross-stele with  
hunting scene  
(ECMS).

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## PROLOGUE

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### A SCENE FROM SPORTING LIFE

At Eassie, Angus, in the heart of southern Pictish territory, stands a sculptured stone pillar (frontispiece to the Prologue) which introduces us to some of the main topics of this book. The rear face of the stone, which is badly eroded, has Pictish symbols, and processions of men and cattle. It was, however, the front face of the pillar which was the main reason for its erection. Its dominant feature is a cross, carved in shallow relief and ornamented with interlace designs similar to those on the ornamented pages of Gospel books, as well as on 8th-century jewellery. Upon the transom of the cross stand two angels with spread wings.

Below the transom is an apparently secular scene, namely a deer hunt. Before we look at this in detail, however, we must consider the main theme of the stele, namely the cross-design itself. At the crossing of shaft and transom is a decorated circle, and the four arms are linked by curves which are the last trace of what on earlier crosses had been a continuous ring. That itself was a reminder of the Classical wreath of victory, and it thus symbolised the ultimate triumph of Christ's crucifixion over sin and death. The ornamental interlace, recalling precious jewellery, emphasises the spiritual treasure embodied in the symbol.

Today, we can best appreciate the reverence and awe which the cross-symbol inspired through a poem written by Abbot Alcuin. Trained as a priest at York, he was ultimately appointed by Charlemagne as abbot of Saint-Martin at Tour (AD 796-804). In a Latin poem, he extolled the Cross as 'the world's delight, sanctified in Jesus' blood... Jesus, by, giving his life to the Cross triumphed over death... Excellent Cross, the world must give its thanks to you' (Godman 1985, 138-43).

Turning to the hunting scene, this fills the panels both sides of the stem of the cross. To the viewer's left is a man carrying a spear and a square targe. He strides purposefully forward to the hunt on the other side of the cross-shaft: there represented by a stag with a six-point head of antlers, and two dogs, apparently a mastiff and a greyhound or lurcher. We should not be surprised at the smallness of this hunting party, for in fact it contains all that is needed to flush the deer, bring it to a stand, and finally despatch it.

Support for this is given by a British (that is, Old Welsh) poem, which had been composed in Cumbria most probably in the 7th century. Formally it is a cradle song for the child Dinogad. His father 'went a-hunting/ A spear on his shoulder, a club in his hand' with his two nimble hounds:

'When thy father went to the mountain  
He would bring back a roe-buck, a wild boar, a stag'  
(Jarman 1988, 68-69, 153).

It is difficult to imagine a closer relationship between word and image than that between the British lullaby and the Pictish carving. We should also note that Dinogad was a noble child, whose lullaby was sung by eight slaves as well as his mother. We may reasonably believe that the Eassie hunter was likewise a nobleman.

But if the poem authenticates the carving, a more profound question remains, namely: why is this secular hunting scene in such a close relationship with the Cross? We must assume that there was some compatibility between the themes of the chase and of the Cross; in other words, that there was some religious significance in the hunt itself.

At the simplest level of interpretation, the stag recalls Psalm 42:1, 'As the deer longs for springs of water, so my soul longs for thee, O God'. This theme appears on Mediterranean mosaics as early as the 5th century AD. So the deer at Eassie may represent the Christian soul seeking salvation. What, then are the dogs and the hunter? The dogs, which are clearly harrying and persecuting the deer, are the hounds of hell, driven on by the Devil himself, represented here by the hunter. The dogs may even represent individual sins: the large one anger or gluttony, the slender one covetousness or envy.

This is only one of several ways of interpreting the Eassie cross-face in terms of Christian symbolism. In later medieval iconography, the deer may represent Christ himself as a victim persecuted by the hunt; or the hunt may symbolise the Christian soul in pursuit of Christ and his salvation (Cummins 1988). The medieval mind could readily adapt itself to ideas which, to a modern, rigorously analytical mind, might appear mutually inconsistent.

At this point we cannot follow these implications, but the concept of the medieval thought-pattern of 'multi-think' is further examined in Part Five. When we view the cross-face at Eassie as a unity, its message is the dominance of the Cross itself, with the two angels standing large at the top. So, to a religious—as opposed to a profane—viewer, the message of Eassie may be one of hope for the persecuted soul, and of the triumph of the Cross over the Devil and the hounds of Hell.

But whether the nobleman who had given land to the church and paid for the carving and erection of the stone fully appreciated its religious significance is quite another matter. To him it may have been no more than a fine depiction of his favourite pastime. As for the peasant who saw it daily, it was perhaps no more than a reminder of noble wealth and rank, and of the hunting services which nobles were privileged to exact from peasants.



In this Prologue two categories of unconscious witness—that is, ones which had not originally been intended as historical statements—have yielded information about important aspects of life in northern Britain in the 8th century AD. The two categories are: firstly, material artefacts in the form of stone monuments depicting scenes of human activity; and secondly, words, both written (Alcuin's poem on the Holy Cross), and originally, only spoken (Dinogad's lullaby). From the first category, we may learn not merely about hunting practices, but about dress, jewellery and weapons. From both categories, we may make inferences about social classes and attitudes, and we may speculate about more arcane religious themes.

It is sometimes considered that words are the preserve of the historian, while artefacts are the domain of the archaeologist. Another distinction might be made between works of art—in this case, poetry as well as sculpture—and traditional historical sources. A major theme of this book is that such distinctions and divisions obstruct a holistic understanding of society in action over time. Moreover, in a period when historical evidence of any kind is scanty and fragmented, it is wrong to deny ourselves any potential source of information. In the following pages, within the limits of my own scholarly knowledge and practical experience, I shall make use of a wide range of evidence—verbal and artefactual—in fields as diverse as warfare, religion (both pagan and Christian) art, architecture and minor crafts, the structure and governance of tribal societies, and the pursuit of pleasure among both kings and peasants.

It is my hope that such an eclectic approach will lead readers to new information, and more importantly, to new insights.



# PART ONE

---

## INTRODUCTORY

---

It is the underlying belief of this study that, from the 6th century to the mid-9th century AD, northern Britain had an underlying unity that was distinct, vigorous, even vibrant. The period was one of ethnic, linguistic, and political conflicts, which formed a major activity of a warrior-nobility, and a major topic of poetic creation. It also saw the gradual conversion of the area to Christianity at the expense of Celtic and Germanic paganism; and, by the end, certain debilitating conflicts within the Church itself had largely been resolved. In addition to the poetry, craftsmanship—in metal, stone, and paint—flourished, producing works of major European significance.

Also during these 300 or so years, the foundations were laid for the long-term national composition of northern Britain. In this sense in particular, the past is not a foreign country: it is the land which we have inherited. Such beliefs, including that of the distinctive unity of northern Britain, have however been obscured by conventional historical treatments. These have severed the unity along the line of the modern Anglo-Scottish border; or—worse still—have treated the two northern ethnic and linguistic groups, the Scots (or *Scotti*) and the Picts, as a wholly self-sufficient study.

It should be stressed at the start that the purpose of this volume is not to write a systematic and continuous politico-military history. There are indeed several brave and excellent attempts to achieve this, at least for Scotland (eg MO Anderson 1980; Duncan 1975; Smyth 1984; and note particularly the *Biographical Dictionary* (*BD*) of Williams, Smyth & Kirby 1991). It is this student's view, however, that the evidence is too fragmentary and spasmodic to permit the writing of political and institutional history of conventional form. The survival of the verbal evidence has been largely accidental; and the study of its transmission is still in its infancy. Moreover, the biases of the witnesses—whether the result of ignorance or malice—have not been sufficiently analysed.

In default of a conventional continuous history, I have dealt eclectically with what seem to me to have been the principal activities, interests and achievements of the people and societies of the chosen area and period. I have been particularly interested in two aspects of those activities: firstly, the practicalities and structures of action: for instance, within the main theme of warfare, how were forces recruited, what were their speed and flexibility of movement, what were the seasonal limitations on military expeditions? The second major aspect is that of mentalities—in the modern French historians' sense, perceptions, ideas, ideologies. For instance, what were the common person's perceptions of Christianity and conversion; what social attitudes are reflected in the contemporary poetry; what thoughts, profane or religious were evoked by sculpture (cf the Prologue) or fine metalwork?

These aspects—the practical and the philosophical—will run as continuous threads throughout my narrative.



## DEFINING THE THEMES

Having set out some of the aims and limitations of this survey, it must now be recalled that, as explained in the Preface, its origin was in the 1988-89 Rhind Lectures: *An Heroic Age: War and Society in northern Britain, AD 450-850*. At this point it will be helpful to amplify the scope of this volume by looking in a little more detail at the terms covered by that original title and by the present work.

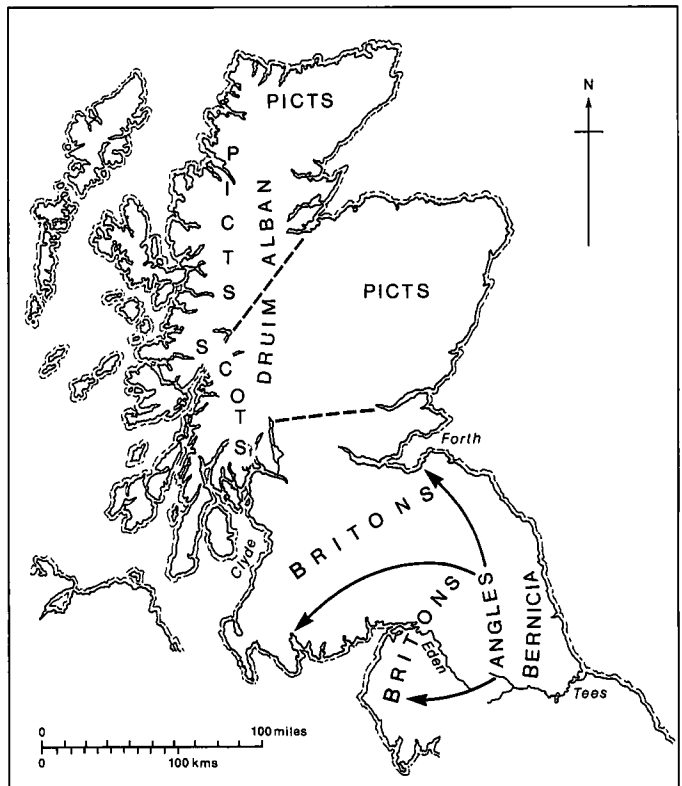
### 1.1 DEFINING NORTHERN BRITAIN

This is not quite the simple geographical expression which it might appear to be. It is not the equivalent of Scotland, though 'North Britain' was indeed used as the name of the northern kingdom after the Treaty of Union in 1707. In the period of this study, the Anglo-Scottish border which became established in the later middle ages was totally irrelevant (illus 1). The principal reason for this assertion is that during the 5th and 6th centuries, the Britons who inhabited the land up to the Forth-Clyde isthmus formed part of a linguistic and cultural continuum which extended south to the English Channel. The poetry of the northern Heroic Age was ultimately preserved among the western Britons of Wales. In relation to the northern Britons, therefore it is difficult to know where to draw a southern cut-off line.

During the later 6th and into the 7th century, Anglian (ie English) warriors and peasants expanded from settlements south of the Tees, ultimately as far north as the Firth of Forth, establishing in the process the kingdom of Bernicia. They also expanded west of the Pennines into Cumbria, and then across the Solway into what is now Dumfries and Galloway, reaching a high-water mark of Anglian expansion in the 8th century. In all these areas, former Anglian settlement is witnessed today by English-derived place-names (Nicolaisen 1975; 1976)

The northern and north-western expansion of the Angles cannot be partitioned between the histories of the two successor

1  
Northern Britain:  
simplified map of  
major land forms  
and peoples.



kingdoms, England and Scotland. In itself it generated conflicts of Angle versus Briton which were a major inspiration of the British Heroic poetry. It also brought the Angles face to face across the Forth with another indigenous Celtic people, the Picts; and at a rather greater remove, an intrusive Celtic people, the Irish/Scots (*Scotti*).

In the conquered and settled areas, the Anglian expansion left major relics of Anglian culture, not least the sculptured cross at Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire, which bears the text of a major poem in Old English (described below). Moreover, the linguistic Anglicization, demonstrated above all by the place-names of the Lothians, forms a major root of that dialect of Old English which, as the 'Old Scots Tongue', became the major language of Scotland itself (Aitken 1988).

All this is an argument for setting the southern boundary of this study well south of the modern Anglo-Scottish border. One possibility would emphasize that northern Britain is an upland area, with the economic constraints which that implies. It might therefore seem logical to include the whole of the northern 'Highland Zone'. But this would also include the southern Pennines, and would lead us very definitely into middle England—an area with its own distinct cultural and political history in our period.

For the purpose of this study, a conceptual border which might seem to be acceptable is that of the Tyne-Erthing gap, the narrowest isthmus south of the Forth-Clyde, and indeed the line of Hadrian's Wall. The fact that the Romans chose it throughout most of their intervention in the North is a commendation in itself. On the ground, however, the broad valleys of the Eden and the Tees, linked by the bleak pass over Stainmore, appear to mark a more definite breach of the northern Pennines. Consistent with this, the northernmost reach of romanisation is marked on the west by Carlisle just south of the Eden, and on the east by the Piercebridge villa on the south bank of the Tees. Moreover, the Tees seems more likely than the Tyne to have formed the southern boundary of the Anglian kingdom of Bernicia. It is therefore more relevant than is Hadrian's Wall. Very broadly, then, this marks the limit of interest to the south.

To the north and north-west, Orkney, and more particularly Shetland and the Outer Hebrides, have rich cultures of their own, which are largely distinct from those of the British mainland. For the most part, therefore, they are excluded from this study.

## 1.2 THE CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE: *c* AD 550-850

The date range of the original Rhind Lectures, AD 450-850, and its adjustment to 550-850 have already been touched on in the Preface. The terminal date was always relatively easy to determine. Around AD 800, Scandinavian settlement began to alter decisively the ethnic and linguistic composition of the Northern Isles and parts of England, and less permanently that of the Western Isles as well. Moreover, raiding along the western coast of Scotland, and well into the interior on the east, was undermining political stability. These events suggest a case for a terminus about 800.

This, however, ignores the importance of other political and military events in northern Britain which—it has been suggested—led to the suppression of Pictish independence, and ultimately to the creation of a combined kingdom of Scots and Picts with its political and religious focus in the east. This event is traditionally attributed to the initiative of the king of Dál Riata, Kenneth son of Alpín (Cinead mac Alpín), who is reputed (in

later chronicles) to have lead the *Scotti* out of Argyll into southern Pictland in about AD 850 (BD, 166). This account is grossly oversimplified, ignoring as it does a Pictish lordship over Dál Riata in 736 to 750; and more importantly, the joint rule over the two nations, enjoyed by two successive kings in the early decades of the 9th century. Nonetheless, the consolidation of the union of the two kingdoms may have been the work of Kenneth. Hence the date of c 850 is a significant marker in the history of northern Britain.

A starting date is more difficult to establish. As noted above, it was originally cited as c AD 450; but mature reflection would reject the myth history, legend and speculation which passes for history, especially in southern Britain, in the later 5th century (contra Alcock 1971; 1989). Indeed, if we consider the availability of reasonable historical evidence, there is a temptation to begin no earlier than the mid-7th century. At that time a major information window begins to open in the north. But by then, many of the movements and internal tensions which characterize the present period of study were well established: those in particular which arose from the intrusion of Irish/Scottish and Anglian dynasties and peoples; from the developing strength of kingship; and from the spread of Christianity. So it is necessary to look farther back in time for the origins of these movements and tensions.

In the north, the first major event that signalled new directions was the migration of an Irish dynasty from north-east Ireland to the region which, albeit anachronistically, we may call Argyll. Traditionally, the principal leader was Fergus Mor, son of Erc, and equally traditionally the date was around AD 500 for this founding of Dál Riata. Subsequently, in the mid-6th century, we can recognize the presence of powerful kings in the north: Ida in Bernicia, Gabhran (descendent of Fergus) among the *Scotti*, and Bruide, son of Maelchon, among the Picts. In the religious field, Columba, exiled from Ulster, settled in Argyll and founded the monastery of Iona. These events suggest the broad date of c AD 550 for the commencement of our study.

It is not easy to find a convenient name for the period AD 550-850. In the past it has commonly been regarded as the central centuries of a period known as the 'Dark Ages'. This is unsatisfactory, however, because it is normally misunderstood. It was originally coined with regard to the loss of the 'Eternal Light of Rome', in the sense both of the Roman Empire and the Christian religion, as a result of the barbarian invasions. It has, however, come to be understood as meaning that the period is obscure to us, because it is not illumined by copious written evidence. This is, however, a gross misconception; especially so in an Insular context, where the verbal evidence for the period greatly exceeds that for the Roman centuries.

On the Continent and in Scandinavia, the term 'Migration-period' (*Völkerwanderungszeit*, *Age des grandes invasions*) is favoured; but strictly this should include the Viking movements, which are expressly excluded here. Recently the term Early Medieval has been favoured, but its use is distinctly ambiguous. Scholars working in the period know that it is intended to be restricted to the centuries up to the 11th, whereas workers in the High and Later Middle Ages apply it to the later 11th and 12th centuries.

Consequently, in this book, the term 'Early Historic' is used to designate the period AD 550-850 rather than the more ambiguous 'early Medieval'. Early Historic better describes the period when, in Britain and Ireland, local written sources, often in vernacular languages and even scripts, become available to supplement the Latin language and

Mediterranean sources. It reflects a revolutionary change in the character of the evidence: a change which deserves to be clearly signalled.

### 1.3 KINGS, WARRIORS, PRIESTS AND CRAFTSMEN OF 'AN HEROIC AGE'

The term 'Heroic', with a capital 'H', is essentially derived from literature, and especially from the Greek epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These purport to tell the politico-military story of the siege of Ilium (Troy) and the subsequent adventures of the Greek king Odysseus (Ulysses), in terms of the personal clashes of noble warriors with one another; or in the case of Odysseus, his personal struggles against misfortune. The term has become extended to other fields of literature which likewise relate conflicts—normally, but not necessarily, military conflicts—in personal terms. The noble rank, and consequently courageous behaviour of the individual warrior, are of the essence in such literature (Chadwick 1912).

The central concern of the Heroic Age of northern Britain is the activities of a group of northern British heroes who lived, fought, and mostly died in the late 6th century AD, in battles in northern England (and possibly south-west Scotland) against Anglian invaders. Their heroism was celebrated in the poetry of the British (or more correctly Early Welsh) poets Aneirin and Taliesin (Lewis 1992; Jarman 1988; 1992a; 1992b; Koch 1995; 1997).

It might appear from this that, in narrow terms, the Heroic Age of northern Britain was of limited geographical extent, but other written sources disprove this. Contemporary annals, compiled principally in Ireland, but also at Iona, are full of references to battles in northern Britain, especially, but not exclusively between the Picts and the Irish settled in Britain (ie the *Scotti*). The venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (a source we shall return to many times) likewise has many reports of warfare among the English, and between them and Britons, Picts and *Scotti*. The characteristic 'Heroic' feature of all these battles is that the only reported deaths are those of kings and nobles.

The single most striking instance of the 'Heroic' ethos in northern Britain comes, however, not from any account of the clash of human beings on an earthly battlefield, but from a religious monument: the Ruthwell cross. The cross will be discussed in detail below (7.1.3 and 22.1.3) but here we note that, in addition to moving scenes from the life of Christ, labelled in Latin, it also bears an inscribed runic poem (illus 2) relating to the Old English religious poem *The Dream of the Rood* or *Vision of the Cross* (Kemble 1844, 36-7). In that poem, the Cross itself relates:

'Then the young hero prepared himself  
that was Almighty God  
strong and firm of mood  
he mounted the lofty cross  
courageously in the sight of many (Cassidy 1992, 14).

Here we see the absorption of Heroic, essentially pagan, ideas into Christian ideology.



2  
A segment of the  
Ruthwell cross  
with part of the  
inscribed runic  
poem (from Stuart  
1867).

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## THE WITNESSES

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION: WRITTEN AND MATERIAL EVIDENCE

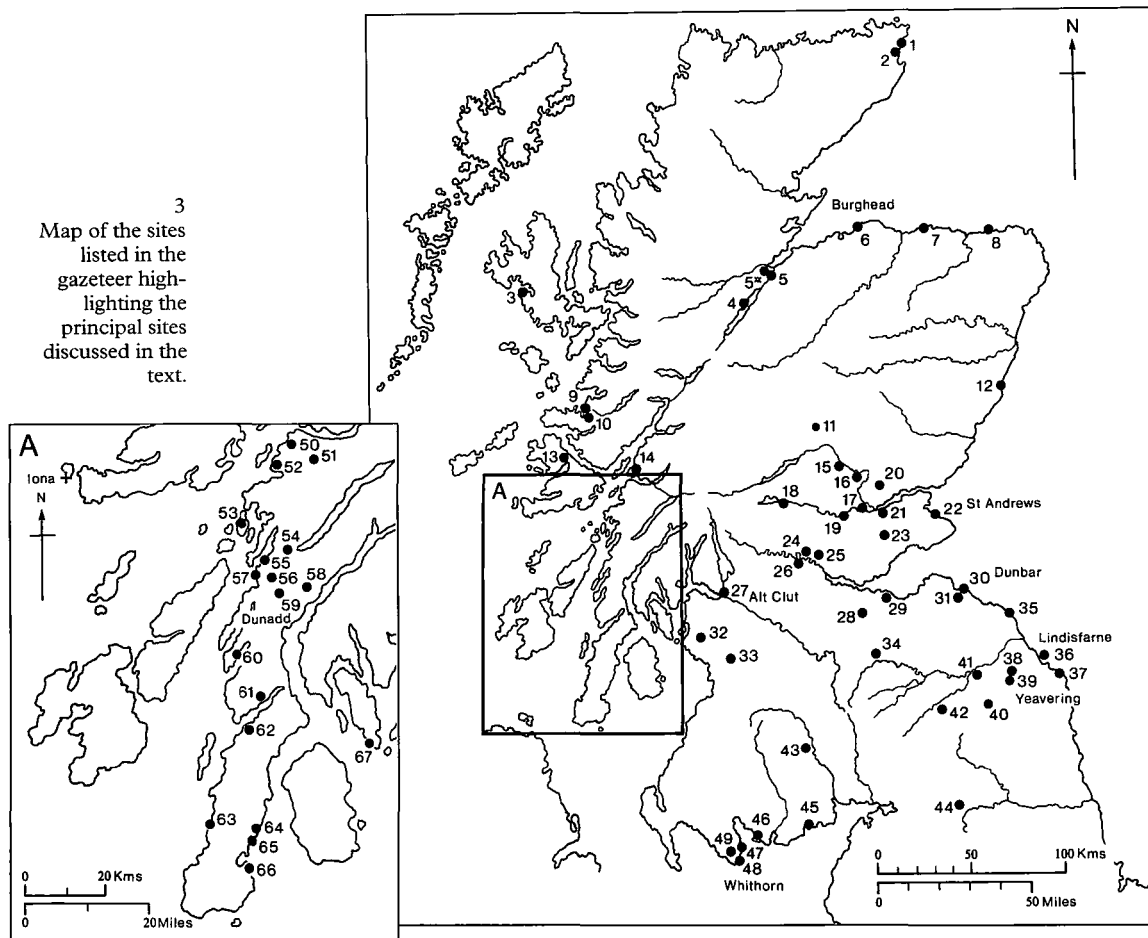
The kinds of evidence which inform this study are very different from those available for the writing of modern history, or even that of the later Middle Ages. Even if we exclude the material or artefactual evidence, and confine ourselves to the written or verbal witnesses, the most copious of them are still unlike those of later times. They include hagiography, replete with miracle stories; annals, king-lists and related writings characterised by their extreme terseness; and chronicles compiled or invented long after the events which they purport to describe.

Although there is no single convenient manual to guide us in the critical study of early medieval historical writing in Britain, there is an admirable introduction to the sources for the history of Early Christian Ireland (Hughes 1972). This is highly relevant, not merely because the Irish established a dynasty in northern Britain, *c* AD 500; but more particularly because, as a by-product of that colonisation, events in our area were frequently recorded in annals compiled in Irish monasteries.

From the writings of Hughes and others (notably Dumville, *passim*; Kirby 1994; 1997), it is evident that in using written information of early medieval date, there are two fundamental questions to be asked, even if they are not necessarily capable of being answered in every case. The first is: how did the original writer know a particular item of information? Was it from direct observation of an event, or from some earlier written statement, or by hearsay at second or third hand? In brief, what were his sources? The second question is: how did the statement of this original writer come down to us? Since it is quite unlikely that the original writing itself has been preserved, how faithful are the copies which we have, what has been added, and what modified?

Examples of the working of these critical principles will be found scattered throughout this study. For the moment, however, it will be useful to list the principal kinds of written statement, and indicate some of the particular problems which they raise.

Turning briefly to the material evidence, this is primarily the domain of the archaeologist, including students of art and architecture. It differs in no significant way from that in preliterate, Classical, or later historical periods. Excellent introductions to the aims and methods of archaeology are widely available and are broadly understood. In the present chapter, a brief discussion is confined to the topic of chronology. It should, however, be stressed that the number of archaeological sites attributed to the Early Historic period is already large (gazeteer and illus 3); that it is steadily growing; and that this growth necessarily brings with it an ever increasing collection of portable artefacts. Descriptive accounts and discussions of these sites and other artefacts form an important element in this survey.



## 2.2 CLASSES OF WRITTEN EVIDENCE

### 2.2.1 Narratives

By far the most impressive and significant writer of historical narratives in our period was the Venerable Bede, with his major *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*), as well as other writings on the lives of northern English clerics (illus 4). He has indeed been hailed as the first modern historian, for two principal reasons: first, his concern for accurate and detailed chronology; and second, his conscientious attempt to establish the truth of his statements. Where possible he quotes written sources, going to great pains to seek them out from colleagues in distant monasteries.

Where suitable written evidence was unavailable, he sought out what he claimed to be reliable witnesses. This cannot have been altogether easy, for almost two-thirds of the *Historia* deals with events which had occurred before Bede's own birth in AD 673. Sometimes it is quite evident that his cited informant was very old indeed.

Without detracting at all from Bede's general high reputation as a responsible historian, several negative aspects of the *Historia* must be mentioned here because of their special relevance. Firstly, Bede had a strong hostility to the British, ostensibly, though not wholly, because they had failed to preach the gospel to the English (*HE* i, 22). So strong was this hostility that he was prepared to applaud the pagan Anglian king Æthelfrith for his slaughter of some 1200 British monks who were praying for their fellow Britons at the battle of Chester (*HE* ii, 2). This anti-British bias must be allowed for, especially in relation to his account of the ravaging of Northumbria by the British king Cadwallon (d ad 634).

Secondly, in relation to one of the major themes of this study—warfare—Bede provides colourful and circumstantial accounts of battles and their consequences: from Æthelfrith's defeat of the Dál Riata king Áedán at *Degsastan* in AD 603—that is, 70 years before Bede's birth—to the overthrow of Ecgrith of Northumbria (AD 670–85) and his army by the Picts in 685, when he was twelve years old. Thereafter, there are only two terse battle-references in the *Historia*, in AD 698 and 711. In other words, all the earlier—supposedly circumstantial—details are based, at best, on hearsay.

Another source has indeed been suggested for the language of his battle-accounts. Detailed analysis of Bede's phraseology has demonstrated that it is closely comparable with Old Testament accounts of battles. As a specific example, McClure compares the 30 royal commanders in Penda's army at the battle of Winwaed (*HE* iii, 24) with the 32 kings who accompanied Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, against the Israelites (1 Kings, 20:1; McClure 1983, 89). Developing McClure's theme, it might be suggested that Bede based his account of Cadwallon's slaughter of women and innocent little children (*HE* ii, 20) on the massacre of women, children and infants by Doeg the Edomite in 1 Samuel, 22:19.

The second important narrative-history which is relevant to northern Britain in the 7th century is the *Life of Wilfrid* by Stephen. While far from the majestic scale of the Bede's *Historia*, this is a vigorous, colourful, and irritating biography of a major ecclesiastic. The biography has all the immediacy of an eye-witness account; and indeed the first-hand character of most of it is guaranteed because Stephen was Wilfrid's companion through the last 40 years of his life, having joined him in his 36th year. No doubt Stephen's account of those earlier years would have been received from Wilfrid himself. The biography itself was written between AD 709 and 720.

References to the activities of Wilfrid himself, and also to the clerics, kings, queens and others whom he encountered, will occur frequently throughout the main body of this study. Here it is sufficient to say that the biography provides invaluable insights into the relations, often stormy, between Church and King; the conflicts within the Church, especially over the date of Easter; visits to the Continent, including Rome; and other aspects of political, social and religious life.

Bede and Stephen were both writing a species of hagiography. This is self-evident in the case of the *Life of the holy man*, Wilfrid, who was indeed canonised. For Bede, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was the story of God's chosen people, the English nation. The third



4  
Bede sharpening  
his quill (from a  
codex at Engelburg  
Abbey, Switzerland:  
Shepherd)

major narrative of the 7th century, Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, was even more evidently hagiographical, for it is largely an account of Columba's miracles both during his life and after his death. As such, it is highly relevant to contemporary mentalities, and it will therefore be explored more fully in Part Two.

Incidental to the miracles, however, there is invaluable information about the Columban community on Iona; about Columba's journey up the Great Glen (illus 7) to the northern Picts and their king, Bruide, son of Maelchon (ad 556-84); and about the ships and seamanship, and other secular matters which were essential to the survival of that community.

One other work of Adomnán's deserves mention here: namely, his *De Locis Sanctis*, an account of churches and other buildings in the Holy Land. This contains detailed descriptions, for instance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which had been dictated to Adomnán by Arculf, a Merovingian bishop, who had been ship-wrecked on Iona. Even more remarkable than the written descriptions are a series of ground-plans with very convincing details. Bede himself knew of this as a result of a visit from Adomnán, and wrote an abridged version of it, as well as including excerpts in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*HE* v, 16-17).

## 2.2.2 Annals, king-lists and related writings

Annals are quite simply brief notices of events which had been considered important by the annalist. These might include the deaths of clerics and kings, important battles, and portents such as dragons in the sky and severe snow falls. Notionally they were compiled annually in monastic *scriptoria*, and because of the liturgical need for the correct computation of the date of saints' days, and especially of the movable feast of Easter, their compilation might have begun as early as the founding of any individual monastery. Because of this, and their very terseness, annals have an appearance of immediacy, accuracy and therefore, of historical reliability.

In the present study, the Irish and Iona annals are immediately relevant to northern Britain, and are especially important for identifying fortified places in southern Scotland. But it must be admitted that the appearance of reliability is to some extent misleading. The major problem is that we only possess copies of very much later date; and that between the original date of an annal, and the document as we have it, additions, alterations, mistakes in copying, and chronological displacement may all have occurred.

For these and related reasons, Hughes has tersely declared (1972, 146) 'there is no short cut to estimating the historical reliability of the [Irish] annals'. In making use of them, it is not enough to have an up-to-date edition of the text: it is also necessary to be aware of the current state of scholarly criticism.

Another aid in establishing a chronological framework is provided by lists of successive kings, giving their reign-lengths. Events may then sometimes be fixed as occurring in year Y of king K. Bede referred to such a compilation when he recorded that 'those who compute the times of kings' had agreed to expunge the memory of certain apostate kings (*HE* iii, 1). Incidentally, the possibility of such manipulation leaves one little confidence in the integrity of a king-list framework.

For northern Britain, the most sustained and significant exploitation of king-lists in order

to establish a framework for history is to be found in MO Anderson's study (1980) of kings and kingship in early medieval Scotland. The Scottish and Pictish lists come to us in manuscripts no earlier than the 13th century, though some of the Dál Riata ones are descended from an Irish list of the 11th century (Anderson 1980, 43-4).

In northern Britain, as elsewhere, some of the manuscripts consist largely of simple lists of regnal years. Others have brief interpolated accounts of historical events, so that a simple king-list becomes a species of chronicle. It is difficult to be sure where these interpolations have come from, but it is possible that they have been preserved in oral traditions. Much research has been carried out in recent decades into the reliability of such traditions, especially by comparing oral memories among emergent African nations with the written administrative records of the former occupying power. On the whole, the results do little to support the reliability of oral memory (Clanchy, 1970; Henige 1974).

In our area of interest, we have some basis for testing the credibility of the actual reign lengths by cross-checking between the several lists; but there is little basis for testing the interpolations. We may, however, single out one incident because of its high significance in the supposed record of the relations of the Scots and the Picts. This is the claim that, having destroyed the Picts, Kenneth, son of Alpin, led the Scots out of Argyll into the land of the Picts. As we noted above, this accords poorly with the dynastic record of the previous decades, when Constantine and Oengus, sons of Fergus, ruled in succession over both the Scots and the Picts (MO Anderson 1980, 191-4; *BD*, 90 & 188; and see below Chapter 4). In view of this, the claim of Kenneth son of Alpin should probably be placed in Lewis's (1975) category of 'History invented'. In this case, it is the dynastic history, itself established through the lists, which makes it possible to criticize the claim made for Kenneth.

### 2.2.3 Poetry

Poetry has been seen as the essence of Heroic Ages from the *Odyssey* to *Beowulf* and the Viking *Sagas*. The court of a warrior king or noble would have given patronage to a bard, whose role was to extol the martial valour of the leader and his war band; and no less important, to praise his patron's hospitality and wider generosity. This is indeed very evident in the case of the Heroic Age of northern Britain. Such poetry has a paramount place in the history of European literature. Moreover, it is in the poems of Aneirin, Taliesin and their successors that we get our closest insights into the social customs and structures, and even the mentalities, of the potentate class. (No full bibliography is offered here: it would be vast, contentious, and growing. A relevant starting point is the recent sampler by JT Koch, 1995).

In the present context, however, we must ask whether we can also find in the poetry evidence relevant to conventional military and political history. The belief in such a possibility stems ultimately from the accounts of the Latin writers Posidonius (Tierney 1960, 248; 250-1) and Tacitus (*Germania*, 2) that the early Celts and Germans used poetry and song in order to remember and recall their ancestors' deeds of valour. The view that historical events might be memorized in this way was then reinforced by the belief that the very structure of poetry—whether metre alone, or metre and rhyme—reinforced memory, so that stories in verse would be remembered accurately over a span of generations, if not centuries.

In keeping with these beliefs, it has sometimes been suggested that echoes of poetry can be heard behind some of the terse entries in the early years of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Another such echo has been detected in northern Britain: Colgrave, in commenting on Bede's account of the ravaging of Æthelfrith (AD 592-617) of Northumbria (*HE* i, 34), suggests that it 'may well have been influenced by some lost heroic poem celebrating the deeds of Æthelfrith' (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, 116, n 1). This is, of course, mere supposition; and even if it were true, we have no basis for assessing the historical veracity of the poem.

In the case of Brittonic or Early Welsh verse, in the early poems—especially those of Taliesin—we have terse, passing references to named battles, celebrating the patron's victories. By the 9th century, however, the mood has changed to laments for the loss of close relations and of the courtly hall (Rowland 1990). Only in one case do we have what appears to be an extended poem dealing with a single campaign: the *Gododdin* of Aneirin (most recent discussion, Koch, JT 1997). Strictly speaking, this is not a coherent poem, but a collection of elegiac stanzas, each celebrating the exploits and lamenting the death of an individual noble warrior, from which no continuous military narrative can be constructed.

Despite this, since a reliable edition and English translation became available in 1969 (Jackson, K H 1969), archaeologists, historians, and students of literature have found a veritable treasure-mound of information, and source of dispute, in the *Gododdin*. The present survey is deliberately confined to two issues—the strategy of the Gododdin campaign (10.5.1) and the weapon-play of the warriors (12)—and adopts what some readers may regard as a reductionist stance. This in no way detracts from the historical value of the poetry in the fields of literature and of social mentalities. It is hoped, however, that it may lead to a realistic, rather than a romantic, appraisal of Early Historic warfare.

## 2.3 CHRONOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

### 2.3.1 Written sources

The fixing of an accurate and precise chronology in our period is almost entirely dependant on written sources. There is, however, considerable variation in the reliability and precision of the dates which they provide. It has already been mentioned that the apparently firm dates of the annals may become displaced in the process of copying: but this must be treated rather as an exception than as the rule.

Of narrative writers, Stephen comes close to eschewing dates altogether, though he does occasionally refer to an event happening in a particular year of a king's reign: for instance, Archbishop Berhtwald came to northern Britain from Canterbury 'in the first year of king Osred'. This, however, was a special case, no doubt inspired by the fact that Osred I was the adopted son of Stephen's hero, Wilfrid (*W*, 50-51).

In complete contrast Bede gives the following information about the deaths of Edwin of Northumbria (AD 617-33) (*HE* ii, 20) and Oswald (AD 634-42) (*HE* iii, 9; v, 24): age at death, regnal year, day, month, and year AD. On the other hand, he gives no date for the victory of Oswald over the British king, Cadwallon, at Heavenfield, despite its major significance both in putting an end to Cadwallon's attempt at securing overlordship, and no less important in Bede's eyes, the defeat of the British heretics.

The reason for the day and month precision for the deaths of these kings is simply explained: they were both regarded as martyrs, and their death day would be recorded in martyrologies, which would be maintained in all major churches and monasteries (CW Jones 1968). In the same way, Æthelburh, a holy virgin whose body was found to be uncorrupted after seven years, was canonised and her festal day (but not the year of her death) is recorded by Bede (*HE* iii, 8). As for Bede's citing of the regnal years of Edwin and Oswald, these would have come from a king-list of the kind mentioned above.

Another example of a precise date is the dedication stone of the church of St Paul at Jarrow, on the 'ninth Kalends of May (ie April 23) in the fifteenth year of King Ecgrith and the fourth year of Abbot Ceolfrihth' (Taylor, HM & J 1965, 347). The year-date of AD 685 has to be supplied from Bede's notice of the king's death (*HE* iv, 26; v, 24).

It is evident from these case studies that, from the introduction of Christianity, written records were being compiled of important events, especially concerning the reigns and deaths of kings. But it is equally certain that only under very special circumstances are we likely to learn such precise dates within our period.

### 2.3.2 Material evidence – archaeological and typological

The material evidence for chronology takes two distinct but inter-related forms: the strictly archaeological, and the essentially scientific. The principal method of archaeology is that of typology: in simple terms, the close comparison of artefacts of similar design or function, with a view to establishing evolutionary sequences, or transferring a date already established for one object to another similar one. The term artefact includes both portable objects (tools, weapons, jewellery) and fixed ones (houses, forts).

As it happens, in our period forts are very common, and much effort has been devoted to establishing typological groups as a basis for dating them. Unfortunately for the method, two classes have very wide dating brackets. One of these consists of more-or-less circular forts classed as duns, which certainly appear in the pre-Roman Iron age, but equally certainly were sometimes, perhaps frequently, used in the 7th and 8th centuries AD (illus 5 and 13.1–2 below). The other, forts with timber-reinforced ramparts, may have an even longer time-span.

5  
A classic dun of  
the period:  
Dunadd, Argyll  
(*Historic Scotland*).

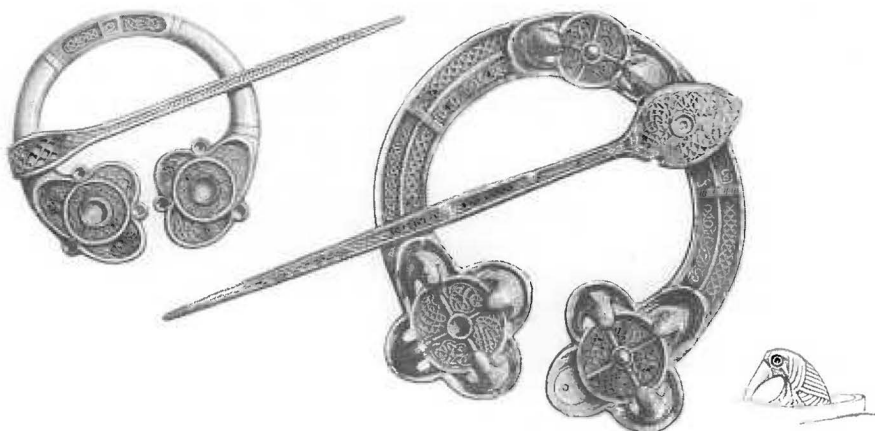
In wider fields and over long periods, pottery is an important source for typological dating, because its plastic nature lends itself to considerable variation. In the period of this survey, however, pottery is relatively scarce compared with the Iron Age and Roman period; but this is in part compensated for by the occurrence of vessels imported from the Mediterranean, where they may be dated by association with coins (see 8.1.4 below).

The major area of typological study, however, is that which is sometimes considered as the exclusive domain of the art historian: namely, the study of decorative



designs and representational images on illuminated manuscripts, sculptured monuments, and decorated metalwork (illus 6 and 19 below). The present survey dismisses this concept of exclusivity, on the grounds that 'art objects' not only comprise a very large proportion of the surviving material evidence but also provide the most profound insights into the social mentalities of the period.

6  
Characteristic  
objects of the  
period: penannular  
brooches (with  
detail) from  
Rogart, Sutherland  
(*ECMS*).



Because of the potential flexibility of the decorative designs, they lend themselves to very detailed typological studies. Consequently, a closely-argued meshwork of reasoning has been created. But the outside observer, even the most sympathetic, must often be left with the impression that the resulting chronological schemes are highly contentious, and based on rather opaque reasoning (18.1.4).

### 2.3.3 Scientific dating evidence

Whether in default of historical and archaeological dates, or in partnership with them, scientific techniques have an important role to play in establishing a chronology for Early Historic Northern Britain. Indeed, among the approximately 70 secular sites listed in the Gazetteer (at end of volume and illus 3), some 20% have been dated by such means.

In the overwhelming number of cases, the technique has been that of radiocarbon, or C14, dating. This is based on the facts that all organisms, whether animal or vegetable, contain carbon; that a very small part of that carbon consists of a radioactive isotope, labelled C14; and that while the level of C14 remains constant throughout the life-span of the organism, it decays slowly after its death. Because of the ubiquity of organic materials, samples for measuring the degree of decay are readily accessible. Unfortunately, the decay rate is constant only in statistical terms, so that radiocarbon dates can only be cited as estimates within a statistical bracket. There are other technical problems as well, and consequently C14 dates are rather coarse by comparison with historical dates.

Another technique derived from the physical sciences is that of dating by thermoluminescence, or TL dating. This uses certain minerals which have been strongly heated through human activities, for instance in clay for pottery, or in rocks for hearth settings. It is then possible to measure the radio-active particles which have become trapped in the sample since the heating episode. The technique has recently been extended to timber-laced forts which had been destroyed by burning, when the rocks of the rampart

may become so hot as to melt or vitrify (Sanderson, Placido & Tate 1988). An example of particular relevance here is the large Pictish fort of Finavon, Angus.

Botany has also become an important chronological tool, in the form of dendrochronology: that is, the dating of ancient timbers by matching the pattern of wide and narrow growth-rings between trees of known age against archaeological specimens, such as timber from buildings. At its best, the tree-ring dating method is accurate to a single year, and dendrochronology has been widely used to adjust the approximations of C14 dating. An outstanding example in Early Historic Scotland is the dating of the sequence of buildings on the crannog at Buiston, Ayrshire (see below 16.4.1).

## 2.4 SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS: SURVIVALS, DEVELOPMENTS AND INERTIA

Copious and varied though the written sources are, the interests and fields of knowledge of their writers are too specialized, and their narratives too spasmodic, to provide a sound basis for writing a continuous political history. Used eclectically, however, over a wide time-span, they can offer valuable insights into social structures and social attitudes and mentalities. This is particularly true in the interacting fields of warfare, kingship and religion; all matters of greatest importance to the higher ranks of society.

Such eclecticism may be extended, not only over the three centuries on which this study is focused, but on occasion even beyond into the feudal age. The legitimacy of such a wide-ranging approach has been challenged, especially in relation to the use of the Welsh Laws—known only from manuscripts of the 13th and later centuries—to illuminate the society of the 10th and earlier periods. Other scholars, as long ago as the writings of Maitland, have found it profitable to seek, behind the documents of feudalism, social and economic customs of great antiquity (Maitland 1897; Jolliffe 1926; Rees 1963).

A major theoretical justification for wide-ranging eclecticism lies in the principle of the basic inertia of history, or rather of historical processes, in pre-industrial societies. (This principle is related to, but essentially independent of, Braudel's concept of *la longue durée*). This is not to say that no developments occurred among the nations of northern Britain during the centuries of our study: two obvious examples are, of course, the increasing power of kingship, and the gradual development of more-or-less uniform religious practices throughout Britain and Ireland.

The inertia of history can be demonstrated at the present day by two examples, one trivial, the other more weighty. At the minor level we may instance the persistence of functionless cuff buttons on men's jackets. On a major scale, there is the survival of long-defunct laws on the English Statute Book—a point not irrelevant to the token survival of pre-feudal economic, social and legal arrangements in the Welsh Laws.

From earlier times, we have the precise and well-documented instance of the survival of the requirement that a newly inaugurated chief should prove his worth by undertaking a cattle-raid. This practice, found in the Irish laws as early as the 7th century (O'Riain 1974), had only recently died out when Martin Martin toured the Western Isles in the late 17th century (Martin 1716, 101-2).

In the period of our study, however, we may make a particular appeal to the static condi-

tion of that basic farming economy which underpinned the whole of society, as the root cause of the inertia of historical processes. For the pastoralist, there was of course no possibility of increasing output. A mature cow could produce one calf a year, and no more, and likewise a ewe was only expected to yield one lamb a year. This is clear from as late as the 13th century manuals of husbandry, such as that of Walter of Henley (Lamond and Cunningham 1890). A sow might indeed produce three litters a year, with perhaps up to eight or ten piglets in each. There was no way in which these numbers could be increased.

In the case of food-crops, there is no evidence for improvements in the methods of cultivation, or for selective breeding of seed grain to produce larger yields. The only way of increasing the production of crops would have been by taking more land into cultivation. For this there is some slight evidence from pollen analysis. Despite this, it is clear that any movement in the agricultural economy can only have been very slow.

This concept of social and economic inertia needs to be kept in mind throughout the present survey

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## THE SETTING

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### 3.1 THE SHAPE OF THE LAND

#### 3.1.1 The underlying structure

Northern Britain, in terms of this study, falls entirely in the Highland Zone as defined by Fox (1932; 1938—but without accepting some of Fox's theories about Highland Zone conservatism). That is to say, the solid geology of northern Scotland consists largely of the oldest rocks, which are normally very hard. In very broad terms, the rocks become progressively younger to the south; but especially in western Scotland, later volcanic action has penetrated into the older rocks. Because of the northern situation, the rocks were subjected to considerable glacial sculpting during Pleistocene glaciations; and even in post-glacial times, the severe climate has led to continued erosion.

These factors have created great variations in relief, so that northern Britain is dominated by peaks and plateaus, rising to altitudes of between 2930ft [880m] (Cross Fell) and 3210ft [963m] (Scafell) in the northern Pennines and the Lake District; 2681ft [804m] (Cheviot) and 2765ft [830m] (Merrick) in the Border Hills; and very widely and frequently over 3000ft [900m] north of the Forth-Clyde isthmus, climaxing on Ben Nevis at 4406ft [1322m], and only a little short of that on the extensive Cairngorm plateau. Only in the east, especially in the Buchan promontory, are there wide areas of lowland; and also in more broken areas on the Forth-Clyde isthmus, and around the Solway Firth.

Glacial sculpting has also caused the heights to be balanced by over-deepened valleys. Inland, these form long freshwater lakes. The alignment of such lakes extends to the coast, and creates bays, firths, and sea lochs, which may often be linked with freshwater lochs by means of quite short portages. These present opportunities for travel and transport deep into the interior, and even, as in the Great Glen, from one coast to another (illus 7). Such communication links were explored long ago by Lindsay Scott (1951) in relation to the prehistoric colonization of Scotland. They have,

7  
A view down the  
Great Glen  
(Patricia & Angus  
Macdonald)



however, largely been ignored by the historians of later periods, except for the episode of Columba's mission from Iona to the Pictish court at the north-east end of the Great Glen (6.3.3 below), and the Viking incursions.

Superimposed on the basic solid geology and relief there is a sharp west/east divide, and a more subtle north/south grade. The first of these coincides, north of the Forth-Clyde isthmus, with what was known in our period as *Druim Alban*, the Ridge or Spine of Britain. West of this, the climate is an Atlantic one, with much heavier average rainfall than in the east. It is also a softer climate, because of the warming influence of the Gulf Stream. The north/south grade, in simplified terms, is marked by an overall rise in average temperatures. To some extent, this is counterbalanced by the increase of summer daylight hours in the north. The influence of these variations on the basic activities of haymaking and the barley-harvest are far from simple (see maps in Coppock 1976, figs 14 & 15).

In terms of external connections, we should first note that Cumbria and south-western Scotland are visible from north-eastern Ireland and the Isle of Man. Even as far north as the Inner Hebrides, the sailing/rowing distance from Ireland was not extreme, though the hazards of tide-races, storms and sea-mists were not negligible. Perhaps more surprising, the southern end of the Irish Sea was open to maritime connections with Gaul and even the Mediterranean. In the North Sea, however, despite the fact that the original homelands of the Angles lay in Denmark and north Germany, the establishment of more permanent sea-contacts with northern Europe had to await the coming of the Vikings, with their stepping stones in Shetland and Orkney.

### 3.1.2 The natural vegetation

This section may usefully end with a brief note on the natural vegetation which clothed the solid geology. There is a popular and persistent belief that the whole land north of the Forth-Clyde isthmus was originally covered with an unbroken extent of Scots pine: the Great Caledonian Forest. This belief is not shared by palaeobotanists. For a start, the higher mountains, and especially the extensive high plateaus like the Cairngorms, have never carried anything more than an arctic-alpine vegetation since the retreat of the ice.

Moreover, as decades of field research throughout northern Europe (including Britain) have demonstrated, the retreating ice was followed over a period of millennia by a regular plant succession. Basically this was: tundra/willow> birch> pine> broad-leaved trees, especially oak; but it must be appreciated that the amelioration of climate over time was not the only factor involved. Soils, aspect and above all altitude played their part, and in a sense the sequence outlined here may be read in terms of altitude descending from the Cairngorm plateau.

A hypothetical distribution map of the principal woodland species can be reconstructed for the present (ie Early Postglacial) climatic period. This shows oak, with some birch, predominating to the south of the Grampian mountains, along the Great Glen, in the Kintyre peninsula, and to a scattered extent in Islay and others of the Inner Hebrides. North and east of the oak predominance, pine with some birch and oak dominates, except on the mountain heights. In the far north and west, including Skye and parts of the Outer Isles, birch is predominant together with some hazel and juniper (Price 1983, fig 5.8, citing McVean & Ratcliffe 1962).

This map is hypothetical in the sense that it reconstructs a distribution 'before the onset of large-scale human forest-clearance'. But the massive reduction represented by the actual observed distribution (Price 1983, fig 5.7) should not be attributed simply to direct human forest clearance. No doubt that has been extensive over the centuries. In the period of this study, timber would have been needed in quantity especially for building dwellings and fortifications. In addition to direct human action, there would be secondary, but none the less anthropogenic, causes of forest loss; namely, browsing by domestic cattle and domestic or feral goats. A further, non-human, cause would have been browsing by native red deer, which were naturally creatures not of mountain grass-land and heather moors, but of broad-leaved forests.

## 3.2 THE PRODUCTS AND RESOURCES OF THE LAND

### 3.2.1 The capacity for food production

Important though the factors of solid geology, relief, communications, and natural vegetation were in the long term, what was of most immediate interest to the human occupants of the land was its capacity to produce food. This capacity is based essentially on soil types; but these are themselves modified by factors such as altitude, aspect, rainfall, drainage, and others which are difficult to analyse as a basis for generalizations about a large area.

As an example of what may be achieved for a limited area, we may cite a paper on landscape and land use in northern England, being a survey of agricultural potential from c 500 BC to AD 1000 (Higham 1987). The conclusion which we might draw from this penetrating analysis is that, between the Anglo-Scottish border and the Ribble-Humber line, the types of solid geology, overall climate, soil drainage and other factors are many and various, and give rise to equally varied agricultural opportunities and disadvantages.

Attempts have none the less been made to compile atlases of land quality, expressed sometimes as 'soil and land capability for agriculture', either for the whole of Scotland (Dawson 1975; Coppock 1976); or for lesser—but still large—regions such as eastern or south west Scotland (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute: Soil Survey of Scotland, various dates). The first group of these presents very broad divisions: perhaps three-fold, in the categories best, medium and harsh land; or perhaps with up to eight subdivisions of the main categories. The Soil Survey of Scotland, on the other hand, analyses and maps the soils in very great detail. Its conclusions, however, are summarized in no more than seven agricultural land classes, which range from 'land capable of producing a very wide range of crops' to 'land of very limited agricultural value', characterized by the scree litter on the Cairngorm plateau.

When we consider that almost the whole of Dál Riata and the Pictish upland area are classified in the lowest categories of land use, it becomes evident that these maps are not very helpful in determining land potential in the 6th to 9th centuries AD. The reason is twofold: the categories used on the modern maps are concerned only with crop raising; and they are based on modern methods of agriculture, with modern drainage and mechanized ploughing and cropping. The second of these limitations has been discussed in a case study of the economic hinterland of Dunollie, Argyll, an important fortified power centre of the kindred of Lorn (Alcock & Alcock 1987, 137-8). As the location map for Dunollie makes clear (*ibid*, illus 2; here Gazetteer no 50 illus 3), there is very little 'better

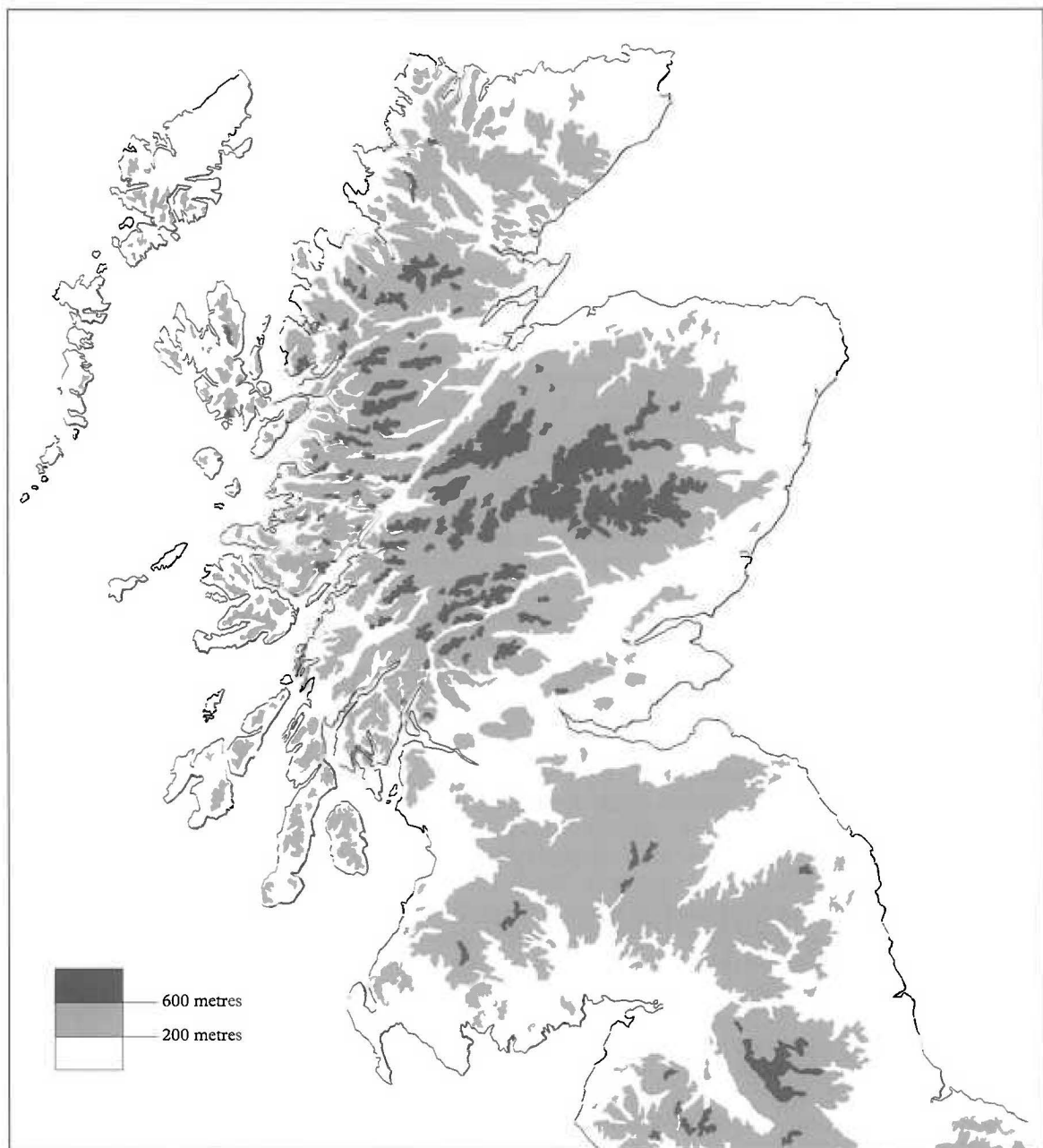
land', as defined by the Soil Survey, in the vicinity of the site. It is argued, however, that in Dál Riata, as elsewhere in northern Britain, 'there are small parcels [of land] worth exploiting by ox-drawn plough, or even foot-plough (*cas chrom*) which are quite inaccessible to combine harvesters'. It was, indeed, on such plots that Dál Riata was able to raise an expeditionary force of two thousand men (11.2.1 below).

To identify such parcels, and to quantify the area of small-scale arable farming, would be impossible without a comprehensive research programme to identify, initially on aerial photographs, and subsequently on the ground, evidence for abandoned cultivation. Much of this would be in the form of the rigs of the recent phases of agriculture. These may be found to overlie earlier field patterns. Apart from such visible traces of early tillage, it has recently become apparent that long phases of prehistoric agriculture may lie buried under relatively recent peat (Davidson & Carter 1997, 59-60). At Lairg in Sutherland it is argued, indeed, that the fields beneath the peat are to be dated to the Early Historic period (McCullagh 1993; Foster 1996, 58; Edwards & Ralston 1997, *passim*).

There is, however, a potentially more accessible method for estimating the maximum extent of pre-Improvement arable farming in the west and north of Scotland. This has been demonstrated in a discussion of the resources of the 6th-/7th-century estate of Glen Urquhart (Alcock & Alcock 1992, 260-2). The potential evidence was provided by the full-colour version of General Roy's Military Survey, on which settlements are coloured red, woodland green, and fields under cultivation are in yellow (col illus I.1). No doubt the extent of arable was greater in the late 18th century than it had been in the 6th to 9th centuries; but Roy's Survey is none the less an excellent corrective to the minimalist bias of modern maps of agricultural capacity.

We may now return to the first of the two biases inherent in the modern maps mentioned above: the emphasis on crop-raising, and the relegation of grazing land to categories 5 and 6 on the 7-point scale. This is to ignore the great significance of cattle in our period, especially as an object of tribute which had the over-riding advantage that it delivered itself to the point of consumption. The very great importance of cattle to the northern economy is documented in records of the high Middle Ages. To cite only one official record: 'the Exchequer Rolls [of Scotland] for 1378 show the number of hides exported as being nearly 45,000' (Haldane 1973, 7). No doubt this and other such later medieval figures would need to be scaled down in order to arrive at early historic numbers. In the absence of any basis for such a quantitative reduction, we may none the less accept the implication that cattle-raising was important for food production in the north, since the beasts which provided the hides must likewise have provided beef, to say nothing of calves, milk and cheese.

Allowing therefore for widespread, though patchy, cereal growing, and the importance of cattle, it may be suggested that for our period, the use of maps based on the supposed suitability of land for crop-raising should be abandoned. At the least such maps need supplementing, if not wholly replacing, by maps which allow both for cattle and for small-scale arable. For this reason, such a base map would show merely two contours (illus 8). That at 200m OD would mark the zone between sea-level and a normal maximum altitude for cereal crops. That at 600m would likewise mark a maximum altitude for the summer grazing of cattle. These are obviously rather crudely defined zones. They have, however, the great merit of restoring to northern Britain a more balanced appreciation of its capacity for food production than is normally allowed.



### 3.3.2 Stone, metals and other resources

Apart from its all-important role as the source of food production, the land provided many other resources. The majority of these will feature in later chapters, but some examples may be briefly mentioned here. Especially in the west and north, stone was readily available, often as loose scree or field stones, for building forts and dwellings. Turf would also have been used for building, and especially for roofing.

8  
Suggested  
contours for  
maximum altitude  
for growing grain  
and for summer  
grazing of cattle  
(after Dunlop).

Complementarily, timber was equally plentiful for the same purposes in the lower regions, especially in the south-east, while in the Central Highlands there were major forests of Caledonian pines.

Workable stone was also needed for monumental carvings, particularly so after the acceptance of Christianity. The superb sculptured cross stelae of the Picts owe much to the outcropping of the fine-grained Old Red Sandstone, while the monuments of Iona benefited from reasonably tractable schistose grits. At a more humble level, similar rocks, including garnet-schists, were favoured for rotary querns.

At the level of fine metalwork, minor but widespread deposits of gold, argentiferous lead, and copper provided the raw materials for jewel smiths. Examples are a vein of argentiferous lead at the foot of the East Lomond fort, which was apparently exploited in ancient times and was certainly worked more recently (New Statistical Account 1791-99, Vol 4, 441); and the alluvial gold deposits of the Strath of Kildonan which attracted a minor gold rush in 1868-9 (RCAHMS 1993, 17). Mostly, however, these deposits are too small to attract modern notice, however adequate they may have been for early medieval craftsmen.

To round off this deliberately eclectic sketch of natural resources, the need of fine calves' skins for vellum should be mentioned. The most obvious use of vellum would have been for the great decorated gospel books of Durrow, Lindisfarne and Kells. But these represent only a fragment of the Church's need, for psalters and other liturgical books, for martyrologies, for administrative documents, and for the recording of secular events in annals. It has been calculated that a single book—admittedly the great *Codex Amiatinus* copy of the complete Holy Bible—required the hides of some 515 calves (Bruce-Mitford 1969, 2).

### 3.3 A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT?

#### 3.3.1 Climate and weather

A view expressed in various forms in what might be called para-historical (or peripheral) circles is that the environment of the early Middle Ages was hostile to both men and beasts: that winters were frequently excessively cold, leading to the loss of animals and crops, and consequently to famine; that diseases—plague among human beings, murrain among beasts—were common; and hence, in one interpretation, the population of Britain fell in the second half of the 1st millennium AD from as many as six million to as little as two million (Burgess 1985, fig 11.3). Similar disastrous conditions obtained in Ireland as well as in both Mediterranean and Continental Europe.

An examination of such evidence as is available in Britain and Ireland gives no support to these interpretations. While it cannot be denied that the coarse pattern and chronology of climatic change in post-glacial Europe is well established over a period of some ten millennia, a refined analysis at the level of a mere three or four centuries is quite difficult. There is indeed a wide measure of agreement that around the middle of the 2nd millennium AD there was a severe climatic deterioration, designated the Little Ice Age. The most spectacular manifestation of this was the freezing of the Thames and some of

the great Continental rivers (recorded in the art of the time), though of course there were considerably more dire effects on grain growing and viticulture.

When we go back to the 1st millennium, however, there is no such clear-cut evidence. It may be expected that in the future, the study of botanical evidence will provide sensitive indicators of climate, valid over wide regions, and chronologically determinate. One potential indicator might be provided by poorly-developed tree-rings, themselves readily datable, and suggestive of harsh environmental conditions (Creber 1977). Another might be datable changes in vegetation revealed in stratified pollen sequences (Whittington 1993; for current examples in northern Britain, see 8.3 here).

At present, however, the evidence is insufficient for wide generalizations; and in the case of tree-ring analysis, the environmental factors which cause trees to produce rings that are narrower than normal are not fully understood. It is presumably the lack of such botanical evidence which has led to an appeal to documentary sources of kinds familiar to historians of the period. For instance, Mytum writes (1986, 35): 'documentary evidence suggests that there was a climatic deterioration immediately after the Roman period, with some improvement by the 9th or 10th century'.

In fact, there is no relevant source of documentary evidence in northern Britain itself. In default, therefore, in the present study we have to turn to the notices of weather-events which are recorded in the Irish Annals, especially the Annals of Ulster, making the assumption that climatic differences between Ireland and northern Britain will be matters of degree rather than kind. The annals refer to events such as great snowfalls, droughts, and frozen rivers. Before they can be analysed for their climatic information, however, some general comments are necessary on the way in which annals were compiled, and the consequent implications for their value as evidence.

For a start, we must notice an inappropriate use of supposed written evidence. It has been claimed that 'reports have survived of [eleven] winters in England between AD 80 and 359' with notable frosts and even frozen rivers (Lamb 1981, 57 and footnote). Of the dates cited, AD 80 is the only one for which there might be a contemporary source among Classical writers on Roman Britain, though in fact no such record is known. So far as the other alleged datable great frosts are concerned, no mention of them is known earlier than a curious meteorological history compiled by Dr Thomas Short in 1749. The editor of a major critical meteorological chronology gives an explicit warning against the reliability of Short's work (Britton 1937, 3-4).

When we turn in detail to the Early Historic Insular annals, beginning in the later 7th century, it is clear from the general pattern of entries that weather, murrain of cattle, and plagues of men were not the principal interests of annalists. That the annalists were not trained weather-recorders is self-evident; but it is also important to stress that they had no regular agenda, no check-list of the kind of events which they should mention. Once the deaths of priests and kings had been recorded, what was entered was a matter of the interest of the individual annalist. Consequently, the absence of snow, rain and frost from a run of annals may reflect either benign weather, or lack of personal scribal interest.

We must also accept that a single severe weather-event is likely to have affected a wide area, and therefore would be recorded in the annals of several different scriptoria. Moreover, sets of annals were passed between monasteries, so an event initially recorded in one centre may be copied into other annals. In the copying, there may have been a

displacement of a year either way. But these individual notices cannot be aggregated to give statistical weight to the record (as appears to be done in Lamb's graphical presentation of 'Dark Age' climate: eg 1981, fig 3.2 and elsewhere). A single weather event, however frequently reported, retains the value of one and only one.

After this necessary discussion of the principles involved in attempting to infer climatic phenomena from the annals, we can now summarize the actual record of events such as great snowfalls and frozen rivers. The individual entries can be grouped, as shown in Table 1, into clusters, separated by several decades without weather reports:

<i>Years AD</i>	<i>Detail of entry</i>	<i>No of entries</i>
588/670	great snowfalls	3
671/747	nil	
748/799	great snowfalls, some accompanied by famine and perishing of cattle	7
800/817	nil	
818/822	abnormal ice	2
823/847	nil	
848/856	snowfall or frost	2
857/894	nil	
895/945	snowfall, frost and rain	7

Table 1  
Occurrences of  
major climatic  
events recorded  
between AD 588  
and 945

It is evident from this summary that the annals do not present a continuous or systematic weather record, with the obvious implication that they should not be used as if they were systematic. They are indeed very episodic; and they record events because the scribes considered them to be worthy of remark: that is to say, because they were abnormal. This would have been even clearer if the abstract had included signs and portents such as bloody rains, and the appearance of dragons in the sky.

One particular class of entry refers to frozen rivers and lakes, sometimes adding that they were passable to men and animals (AD 856, 941, 945). Such a circumstantial detail might dispose us to believe that the annal was a contemporary and therefore authentic record of an event comparable with the frost-fairs on the river Thames during the Little Ice Age of the 15th century.

But what are we to make of the annal for AD 699/700 (AO Anderson 1922; 1990, 207 with n 3): 'Great frost...the sea froze between Ireland and Scotland, so that there was communication between them on sheet ice'? To accept this it is necessary to ignore the physical factors which militate against the freezing of the sea between Ulster and the Mulls of Galloway and Kintyre: the lower freezing point of sea water; the vertical circulation caused by the sinking of chilled surface water; and tidal currents of around six knots reversing direction roughly four times a day. Perhaps not surprisingly, the annalistic source is 'a seventeenth-century compilation' (Hughes 1972, 99).

A not infrequent natural compensation for a cold winter was an abundance of mast in the following autumn, welcome to the swine and their herds. But the belief that severe winters might be matched by warm summers finds no support in the annals. Hot and/or dry summers are recorded only in 589, 719 and 773. Droughts are mentioned in 714, in 748 following a severe winter, and in 773 resulting in a failure of crops. A particularly disastrous year was 764, when a snowfall lasting almost three months was followed by 'a great scarcity and famine' (presumably because of the loss of crops); and finally by 'an abnormally great drought'.

Altogether, this must seem a meagre bag of weather records from a period of four centuries, which occupy over 300 pages in Mac Airt's and Mac Niocaill's standard text and translation of the Ulster Annals. The overall impression is one of a mixed climate with occasional extreme weather-events; not unlike our subjective impression of British weather over the past 50 or so years. Certainly if we wish for a more precise and detailed record of early historic weather, we must seek it elsewhere than in the annals.

### 3.3.2 Plagues and afflictions

As we have seen, the annals sometimes couple cold winters with subsequent famine, and even specific mention of the death of men and animals. In addition, there are a number of mentions of 'murrain' among cattle. We do not know what particular disease (or perhaps even diseases) is implied, nor the actual numbers lost in any one incident. Nor have we any check on the accuracy of the record. There are no comparable records of animal deaths in Britain.

More important from the human point of view were occurrences of lethal transmittable diseases, and for one series of these, broadly datable AD 664–687, there are accounts from contemporary sources in northern Britain: namely Adomnán, who was already aged 40 when the outbreak began in AD 664; and Bede, who though not born until AD 673 had the experience of being one of only two survivors when the monastery of Jarrow was devastated in 685.

Bede relates how the disease appeared in AD 664, and after ravaging southern Britain, spread to Northumbria. Adomnán, writing in a wide context of the Mediterranean and Continental Europe, appears to distinguish two separate outbreaks—the first beginning in 664, the later one around 685; but it seems more likely that the original disease had continued, albeit sporadically, for two decades or more. The contemporary terms for the outbreak were *mortalitas* and *pestilentia*, and Adomnán uses both in the same passage. One reference at least makes it clear that it was indeed bubonic plague, for Bede, in his *Life* of St Cuthbert, specifically refers to a swelling in the saint's thigh (*VCB*, 8), as an incident in a miraculous healing.

Adomnán, Bede and the author of the *Anonymous Life* of Cuthbert (*VCA*) all mention the loss of life and the degree of depopulation which occurred. Such mortality was obviously to be expected in monasteries, partly because clerics were often highly mobile, and therefore liable to transmit the plague, but more particularly because the closed environment was highly congenial to the rat-flea-human links which the plague needed in order to spread. But the effects were also felt in rural districts, and Bede comments, specifically in the context of a miracle of healing, on the reduction of large, populous settlements to small remnants (*VCB*, 33).

One supplementary result of the plague was a loss of faith among peoples whose conversion to Christianity was at most two generations old. The East Saxons began to restore pagan temples and to worship images (*HE* iii, 30), while some of the Northumbrians tried to ward off disease with the aid of spells and amulets (*HE* iv, 27).

According to Adomnán, the plague did not extend beyond Northumbria, for he expressly states that the Picts and the Irish in Britain (ie the *Scotti*) remained unaffected. Given the level of intercourse between these two peoples and the severely ravaged lands of both Ireland and Northumbria, it is not easy to accept the claim: and scepticism may be reinforced when we consider that the immunity of the *Scotti* and Picts is presented by Adomnán as one of the miracles of power of Columba himself (*VC*, 102b-103b). Indeed, from this and other incidents mentioned above, we must suspect a large ideological element in the miracle-accounts of both Adomnán and Bede. (For a recent, more positive approach to the evidence: Maddicott 1997).

If any class enjoyed a measure of immunity from the disease, it seems to have been royalty. There is no explicit reference in Bede to the death of a king as a result of the plague. Death came to a king most frequently on the field of battle, or through treachery at his own court.

In contrast to the fairly circumstantial evidence available for the impact of bubonic plague in the later 7th century in northern Britain, there is no evidence in the north for an earlier occurrence, the so-called Justinianic plague of the mid-6th century. There is indeed evidence in the Irish Annals for its onset in that island around 544/545. It appears to have lasted for a few years, and then was superseded by a 'Yellow Pestilence'. This may be identified as relapsing fever, which is often associated with jaundice, hence the name (Mac Arthur 1949).

About the same time (though the fine details of chronology are uncertain), 'Yellow Plague', *pestis flava*, is recorded in the Welsh Annals, especially in relation to the death of king Maelgwn of Gwynedd. Recent scholarship, however, would seem, to cast doubt on the integrity and reliability of the Welsh annal (Dumville 1984, 52-4). This leaves us without contemporary evidence for the Justinianic plague in Britain. Admittedly, this conclusion is a product of the overall lack of written sources for the period; but we are not authorized therefore to make good the deficiencies in the evidence by passing off speculation as fact.

This comment applies particularly to Burgess's figures for population decline as a result of plague in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. The hard and precise impression created by the graphical presentation of the decline effectively conceals the softness of the available evidence (Burgess 1985, fig 11.3, repeated elsewhere). The truth is that the upper starting point of the decline is itself open to a 50% modification (Burgess 1985, 198). Thereafter, no figures are more than guesses.

As has been remarked in relation to another scholar's estimate of population decline in Europe in our period: '[It] may well be right, but the evidence to support such a claim is not forthcoming' (Pounds 1994, 144).

### 3.3.3 Legend & Faerie: confronting the supernatural

Behind the environmental basics of rock, soil and climate, and beyond the farmer's perception of land suitable for tillage or grazing, there lies another dimension: the world of legendary history, the supernatural, and faerie. Among the Celtic peoples of north Britain, this is represented on the grand scale by the symmetrical breast-like cone of Schiehallion, literally 'The fairy hill of the Caledonii', rising above the Perthshire landscape. At a lesser scale, any boulder-strewn rock boss in the uplands, or glacial mound in the lowlands, may be designated as *Cnoc Sithean*, or Fairy Knowe, into which an unsuspecting herd or ploughboy may be lured.

As for legendary history, a round stone fort may be identified as that of Dermot, *Dun Diarmaid* (eg on Skye, NGR NG 3538). A large standing stone, adjacent to the circular kerb of a cairn, has been attributed to the same hero, and is known as *Clach Diarmaid*, while the cairn itself 'has locally been thought of as Diarmid's (sic) burial place' (JNG Ritchie 1971a, 1). Such legendary or other-worldly perceptions must be taken into account if we are to approach the mental attitudes of early medieval people; but we must also recognize that the modern mind will find such mentalities difficult to understand.

Among the Germanic people, moors, meres, and ancient barrows might likewise be the haunt of evil creatures, such as trolls and dragons. These concepts had been brought from their ancestral homelands by the Angles, Saxons and other immigrants. Not surprisingly, the fullest account of the depredations which such creatures might wreak on human beings—the *Beowulf* epic—has a Continental setting, in the kingdom of Denmark, and the non-human characters in the poem are largely taken from pagan Germanic sources (Robinson 1991). But this does not imply that England was thought to be free from such creatures and the fears that they excited.

Even conversion to Christianity did not dispel such fears. Indeed, they added a new dimension: the concept of demons in desert places. Essentially these ideas go back to the Early Christian Fathers in the Egyptian desert, and they were absorbed by literate Christians who eagerly read the Lives of the Desert Fathers. One much-quoted English example of the need to cleanse a desert place is cited by Bede (*HE* iii, 23), when Cedd wished to found a monastery at Lastingham among steep and remote hills, fit only for robbers and wild beasts. It should be remarked that Lastingham, the monastery in question, is within 4 miles/6 km of a Roman road. More to the point is that it is even closer to the valley bottom of Ryedale; and at an altitude of around 400 ft OD/120 m it is certainly within the zone of pastoral farming (commentaries by Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 120; Mayr-Harting 1991, 101-2).

It seems surprising that Bede should have been so impressed by the inherent evil of the place and the consequent need to cleanse it, given that he himself lived on the eastern fringe of wild and remote hills. Moreover, at least one of the Northumbrian saints whose Life he wrote—Cuthbert—travelled and evangelized throughout similar terrain. Indeed, it is clear that we have at Lastingham an example of the triumph of subjective attitudes, heavily influenced by Christian literature, over objective reality.

Returning to pre-Christian and non-Christian legends, folk-tales and superstitions: to some extent we can accept and even appreciate their localization in the natural landscape, and even in ancient structures, because many of the myths and legends were collected in the 19th century. This was especially (but not exclusively) the case in Ireland

and Wales (eg by Lady Jane Francesca Wilde and Lady Charlotte Guest), and the process of collection and translation has continued to the present day.

More difficult, however, for the modern mind to understand is the interest shown by Early Historic peoples in the ceremonial and ritual sites of a remoter past, back to the 3rd or 4th millennia BC. Here the obstacle to understanding arises quite simply because there is no bridge of words. The existence of such an interest can be readily demonstrated, however, by three examples among the Angles, the Picts and the Scots.

The Anglian royal centres at Milfield and Yeavering (Northumberland), the Picto-Scottish palace at Forteviot (Perthshire), and the Dál Riata fort and inauguration site at Dunadd (Argyll), are all examples of power-centres which had been founded in landscapes in which earthen and stone monuments of Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date were conspicuous (R Bradley 1987; 1993). At this point we must accept that we are observing a genuine relationship, and not a mere coincidence.

## PART TWO

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### STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY: POLITICS, RELIGION, ECONOMY

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Part One dealt in outline with some basic aspects of northern Britain in the Early Historic period. Part Two examines, sometimes in great detail, the structures of society, under three major themes: politics, religion and economy. It is doubtful whether people of the 6th to 9th centuries would have recognized or understood such categories, even though much of the evidence and analysis deployed here is based on their own words.

It is even more doubtful whether a social historian, seeking to construct a synthesis based on modern theoretical models, would approve of the treatment. It has, however, one particular claim to merit. Recent syntheses have concentrated on the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish, separately or in terms of mutual comparisons. The account offered here (while omitting the Irish of Ireland) includes not only the northern Angles, the Picts and the Britons of the North, but also the 'Irish dwelling in Britain', to use Bede's term for the *Scotti*, the inhabitants of Dál Riata.

It must also be acknowledged that the overall approach of Part Two is minimalist or reductionist, in contrast with some recent studies, which have aimed at wide syntheses. These display one or more of several methodological weaknesses. Firstly, in the historical field, the very brief notices of events in the Irish Annals and in genealogies are strung together to create continuous sequential accounts similar to those of fully documented histories. Secondly, there is an assumption of a high degree of homogeneity in social patterns, certainly among the Celtic peoples of north and west Britain—Irish, Scots, Welsh and Picts—and perhaps extending to the Germanic barbarians as well, so that extrapolations may readily be made between one people and another. Thirdly, the evidence of the fuller and better known records of the 13th and later centuries is projected back in order to infer the social structures, customs and even legal practices of earlier times.

In the present survey, some attempt has been made to avoid large extrapolations and inferences for which there is no immediate evidence. This would seem to be in keeping with one school of Early Medieval historians (eg DM Dumville & DP Kirby). In the case of the archaeological material, it has the advantage of casting a strongly focused light on the often very remarkable artefacts of the period, thus enhancing appreciation of them.



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## POLITICS ONE: KINGS & KINGDOMS

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The term ‘politics’ is used here as a convenient shorthand term for the structures of society, and especially the structures of power and their functioning. It will attempt no idealized, synthesizing models of pan-insular Dark Age society, especially because in the period of this study the evidence is too unevenly preserved as between the four nations of the Angles, the Britons, the Picts and the Scots; and even between one generation and another. Instead it will concentrate on details of historical incidents in annals and narrative histories; incidents to which personal names, ranks and titles are attached, and from which we may infer the dominant persons and classes in society.

In metaphorical terms, these incidents may be thought of as fragmentary blocks from a vast mosaic which was the totality of human activities in Early Historic Northern Britain. The blocks are four-dimensional because of the time factor. Some are quite large, with much internal coherence, and promise of external connections well; others are so fragmented or abraded as to fit no identifiable pattern. Some are drab, colourless; others are vivid in detail and colour—but these pose the question: are the details and colour original, or have they been retouched or (as we have noted above) repainted by narrative authors in later decades or centuries?

Latter-day politico-social schemes blur the potential vividness, and remove the complexities and variety implied by the original mosaic-blocks. Moreover they overlook, or perhaps deliberately ignore, a constraint which is evident to the historian and especially to the archaeologist: namely, the large-scale loss of potential evidence in the present region and period of study. For a start, it is improbable that the available written accounts reveal even as much as one per cent of the total human activity in the period. This is also true of the archaeological evidence for settlements at any but the highest social levels. The preservation and recognition of major religious artefacts might, however, attain to higher proportions of the original output: perhaps as high as 30% in the case of decorated manuscripts and carved stones, much lower in the case of ecclesiastical buildings, and tapering to one percent or less for liturgical items such as chalices.

Turning from these generalizations, we find that in contemporary annals—and more-or-less contemporary narrative accounts—named persons, often designated as ‘kings’, feature largely in incidents of warfare, especially against other kings or peoples (below, Part Three). This may be interpreted to imply the right to muster troops of varied composition in terms of rank and size, the right or even obligation to lead them into battle, and the obligation to maintain them in the field.

The parallel evidence of archaeology reveals among the Celtic peoples the existence of fortifications of varied size, built mainly of stone (13.2 below). Among the Angles, by contrast we find large timber-palisaded sites, often enclosing, or at least associated with large timber buildings (16.2 below). The builders of these works, whether Celt or Angle, are mostly anonymous. However, a positivist inference from the very existence of the structures would imply the rights of potentates to demand quarrying, timber-felling,

carrying and building services, as well as the administrative ability and power to organize them (Alcock 1988a; 1988b).

In abstract terms, then, the evidence of both history and archaeology demonstrates both the power and the attributes of potentates, who are identified in the written sources as kings.

4.1 THE BEHAVIOUR OF KINGS

For the most coherent account of the behaviour of kings, we must look to the Britons of the mid-6th century, and to what Bede called the ‘unmentionable crimes described by their [the Britons] own historian, Gildas’ (*HE* i, 22). These cast a glaring light on the character of Early Historic kingship.

4.1.1 Violent kings

Gildas, writing *c* AD 548, introduces the contemporary kings of his acquaintance with the striking epigram: ‘kings hath Britain, but tyrants (or usurpers)’ (*DEB*, 27). This comment introduces a summary account of royal crimes and sins, in the form of a series of antithetic epigrams. The summary is then followed by ten detailed paragraphs directed at five British named kings, who ruled south-west England and Wales in Gildas’s own day. The style is rhetorical and worthy of an Old Testament prophet, and indeed it is in that light that Gildas saw himself. It would be tedious to repeat the whole of Gildas’s account in his own words, but the introductory epithet conferred on his first victim, Constantine, will give the flavour: ‘tyrant whelp of the filthy lioness of Dumnonia [a kingdom of south-west England]’.

Beyond this, even a summary catalogue is impressive enough. The sins are listed here in the order in which each is first mentioned, with references to the relevant paragraphs in standard texts (eg Winterbottom 1978).

Table 2  
List of the ‘sins’ of  
kings from Gildas

Oath breaking (28);	lust for wife’s sister (32);
torture of royal youths & guardians (28);	ungodly rage (32);
desecration of an altar (28);	haughtiness (32);
diverse adulteries (28,30, 31), including putting away a lawful wife (28, 32);	trust in riches (32);
parricide (28, 30, 33, 35);	regicide (33);
sacrilege (28);	recantation and return to evil after repen- tance (34);
fornication (30);	preferring lying praise-poetry to praise of God (34);
thirst for civil war (30, 32) and plunder (30, 33);	murder of own wife (35) and of husband of desired 2nd wife (35)
diverse murders (31);	
rape of a daughter (31);	

Several wider comments are appropriate here. The first must be on the credibility of the picture of almost unrelieved evil which Gildas presents, in such a rhetorical and seemingly exaggerated form. Since the ostensible purpose of his diatribe against the five British tyrants is that of all good preachers—namely a call to repentance—it is clear that its credibility, and therefore its impact would have been greatly diminished if the rhetoric had been all puff and no substance. Indeed, some of the royal crimes are related in such specific terms that it would have been easy to expose them as falsehoods had they indeed been so.

Moreover, we have good reason to believe that the vicious conduct of kings was not confined to the Britons. On the contrary, in his *History of the Franks*, Gregory of Tours gives many equally specific examples of unbridled immorality and vicious cruelty among the kings of the Merovingian Franks, and no less among their wives and consorts (Thorpe 1974 *passim*).

It must be admitted, however, that such a concentrated catalogue of evil could not be compiled from the pages of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, or of Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*, though it is inconceivable that immoral and violent behaviour did not flourish. Here we are more than ever at the mercy of what witnesses chose to tell us; and that in turn was governed by the particular message which they wished to convey.

A striking instance of silence is furnished by the case of Osred I, who came to the Northumbrian throne in AD 705 at the age of eight. In his verse *Life of Cuthbert*, Bede described him as the 'venerable offspring' of Aldfrith (half-brother of Ecgrith), and a new Josiah, 'mature more in spirit than years'. By his late teens, however, he had turned to a life of violence which included the defiling of nuns and the killing or expulsion of nobles. Perhaps in response to this behaviour, he was assassinated in 716. This must have been well known to Bede, but there is no hint of such behaviour in the *Ecclesiastical History*, despite several mentions of Osred's name (BD, 194).

One indication of the level of royal violence may be gleaned from the *Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain* (BD). In Britain north of Mercia in the period AD 608 to 878, about 30% of kings died in battle; but a further 6% were slain by—or at the instigation of—relations or other contenders for the kingship, and about 12% were assassinated by their own warband. It is difficult to establish the life expectancy of kings, but 40 was probably a ripe old age.

The most frequently recorded form of violence was the removal of dynastic rivals by assassination, often combined with treachery. Bede tells at length how Edwin of Northumbria was persecuted by Æthelfrith; and in particular, how

9  
Images of violent times: a detail from Sueno's Stone, Moray (*Historic Scotland*).



when Edwin was in exile at the court of Rædwald, Æthelfrith attempted to bribe his host and protector either to expel or to slay Edwin. Rædwald's queen, however, persuaded him not to sacrifice a king's honour for Æthelfrith's gold. This story was doubtless remembered at the Northumbrian court after Edwin's accession and conversion because at its core was his pre-vision of Paulinus (of Augustine's mission), who was later to convert him (*HE* ii, 12).

After Edwin had acceded to the Northumbrian throne, a second assassination plot was promoted by Cwichelm of the West Saxons, hoping to deprive Edwin of both his kingdom and his life. The attempt was thwarted by the interposition of a court official (*minister regis*) who was himself slain, together with another of the king's soldiers, while Edwin himself was wounded (*HE* ii, 9).

A less happy outcome to a royal assassination plot was that of Oswiu of Bernicia against Oswine of Deira, the southern kingdom of Northumbria. Behind this there may have been a long-standing feud between the descendants of Æthelfrith of Bernicia and Edwin of Deira. Oswiu had the political intention of re-uniting the two kingdoms as they had been during the reign of his brother Oswald. Oswine, lacking the military strength to resist took refuge in the house of a nobleman (*comes*), whom he believed to be his friend. Despite the duty of honour, the nobleman betrayed Oswine to Oswiu, who had him murdered by a royal minister (*praefectus*). Oswiu, at the instigation of his queen, Eanflæd, subsequently atoned for the dishonourable deed by founding a monastery at Gillingham (Kent) where the crime had been committed (*HE* iii, 14; iii, 24).

Beyond Bernicia, although the annals lack the colourful—though second-hand—details of Bede, they have a laconic immediacy. In 739, Talorggan son of Drostan, king of Atholl (in present day Perthshire), was drowned, *dimersus est*, by Oengus [king of the Picts]. This was a simple case of an overking removing a potential rival. The circumstances of the following case are more obscure: in 734 Talorc son of Congus was bound by his brother, and handed over to the Picts, by whom he was drowned, *in aqua demersus*.

The recording of these two instances of murder by drowning may reflect the interest of a particular scribe, for it seems unlikely that these were the only two occasions on which a person was removed conveniently and bloodlessly.

To bind a noble individual physically was an important way to dishonour him. One of the earliest recorded instances, around 680, arose from the dispute between Ecgrith and his second queen, and bishop Wilfrid (*VW*, chaps 34–38). On Ecgrith's orders the bishop was imprisoned, initially on the island of Lindisfarne (*Broninis*) (Northumberland), and subsequently at Dunbar (*Dynbaer*) (East Lothian). There, the king's orders were that Wilfrid should be fettered hand and foot. But God resisted this: the manacles were either too small or too large and fell off. The chapter heading, *vincula de se cadebant*, recalls, as Stephen no doubt intended, how the chains fell off the apostles Paul and Silas when they were imprisoned (Acts, 16:26). The miracle here, and earlier ones at *Broninis*, reveal that we are in the realm of hagiography rather than of history.

In the annals, however, there can be no doubt about the seriousness and frequency of the act of binding. Between AD 698 and 739, the Iona/Ulster Annals record six bindings, one of them ending in the death by drowning of the victim. Four different terms are used: *vincus*, *ligatur*, *alligatur*, *constringitur*. It should be noted that MacAirt and

MacNiocaill sometimes translate with the milder word 'imprison'. The full meaning is revealed in the annal for 736, concerning the assault of the Pictish king, Oengus, son of Fergus, on Dál Riata, during which the two sons of king Selbach were bound with chains, *catenis alligavit*.

The full symbolic significance of this is revealed in the Irish laws, in the striking phrase 'he is not a king who does not have hostages in fetters' (Kelly 1988, 19; 173-4). For preference, hostages were normally the sons of kings or nobles, as was clearly the case of the two sons of Selbach. In some circumstances, the proper place for hostages was in the king's banqueting hall. Indeed, it is tempting to think that this would have been a normal custom, firstly because that would have been appropriate for persons of rank; but more importantly, because of the prestige value of displaying one's hostages.

#### 4.1.2 Good kings

So far this account has dealt only with the violence and ill-doings of kings, following the Gildasian model. But even Gildas acknowledged that there were examples of good kings. Thus Vortipor, tyrant of the Demetae, could be further blackened by describing him as 'a bad son of a good father, like Manasseh son of Hezekiah' (*DEB*, 31).

In the annals, with their emphasis on battles and the violent death of kings, there is little opportunity to present the better side of royalty. The most obvious examples are of the retreat of kings into the religious life. In AD 723, Selbach, king of Dál Riata, '*clericatus est*', and there is a similar entry in the following year for Nechtan, king of the Picts. It is a matter of conjecture what their motives may have been, and how sincere. Selbach, indeed, attempted to resume his kingship after the expulsion of the son in whose favour he had abdicated (*BD*, 12-3); and Nechtan engaged in various military adventures in the years 726 to 729, before finally returning to a monastery (*BD*, 184).

Anglo-Saxon kings also abandoned the secular and martial life for the religious. In AD 704, Æthelred of Mercia retired as a monk to the monastery of Bardney, Lincolnshire, which he and his wife had founded (*BD*, 26). In earlier years he had ravaged churches and monasteries in Kent, and had defeated Ecgrith of Northumbria in battle (*HE* iv, 12; iv, 21). His nephew Coenred, who succeeded him, went to Rome to receive the tonsure after a mere five years of kingship. Coenred was accompanied by Offa, heir apparent of the East Saxon kingdom, who 'abandoned wife, lands, kinsmen and native land for the sake of Christ' (*HE* v, 19). These were, of course, kings who had opted out: a list which could be greatly extended, as could the catalogue of their motives (Stancliffe 1983).

#### Ecgrith of Northumbria

It is to Bede that we turn for examples of kings celebrated for their good deeds—mostly in connection with the Church. An interesting starting point is provided by Ecgrith, whom we will subsequently see persecuting the distinguished bishop Wilfrid; ravaging innocent Irish people; rejecting the advice of his counsellors, including St Cuthbert himself; and meeting a violent death as a sign of divine retribution. Against this can be set a quite different portrait (Wood 1995).

For a start, we know from an inscription that, less than a month before his death in battle, Ecgrith was named in the dedication of 'the basilica of St Paul' at Jarrow. Eleven years

earlier, as Bede relates, 'the venerable and holy king Ecgrith...donated the land' for the foundation of Benedict's monastery at Wearmouth (*VBA*, chap 1). Subsequently, Ecgrith added another 40 hides of land to that monastery. In AD 685, 'on Ecgrith's advice, or more accurately, command', Jarrow was founded as a daughter house (*VBA*, chap 7). (For the resolution of the contradictions between the dedication inscription and the accounts of Bede and the anonymous author of *Vita Ceolfredi*, see Wood 1995).

In donating land for the two monasteries, Ecgrith was following the example of his father Oswiu, who gave twelve estates each of ten hides to found monasteries (and also his infant daughter as a virgin consecrated to God) as a thank-offering for his victory over Penda of Mercia (*HE* iii, 24). Ecgrith's half-brother Aldfrith, who succeeded him in AD 685, was also a notable patron of the Church. We shall see that Oswiu's elder brother, Oswald, had also contributed greatly to the reputation of the Northumbrian royal house for practical piety.

Indeed, it is difficult in the case of Ecgrith to reconcile Bede's description of him as 'venerable and holy' in his *Lives of the Abbots*, written after AD 716, with the account in the *Ecclesiastical History*, written in 731, of a king condemned by his deeds to divine retribution (*HE* iv, 26). As for Ecgrith's treatment of Wilfrid, much of Stephen's account may be discounted because of the large element of the miraculous. Moreover, even his adulatory biographer cannot conceal that Wilfrid was a quarrelsome and contumacious power-seeker.

### Oswald of Northumbria

For Bede, the finest model of kingship was provided by Oswald of Northumbria, 'favoured of God' (*Deo dilecti*), who, 'fortified by the faith of Christ' (*fide Christi munito*), defeated the immense force of heretic Britons at Denisesburn or Heavenfield (near Hexham, Northumbria) (*HE* iii, 1). Immediately on his accession, he desired that the whole people whom he ruled should be imbued by the grace of the Christian faith. Having been baptised at the monastery on Iona, during his years of exile there, he therefore requested that a bishop should be sent from there to preach to his kingdom.

When Aidan was sent as bishop, Oswald assigned the island of Lindisfarne as his episcopal seat. Moreover, since the king had learned to speak Irish on Iona, he acted as Aidan's interpreter to his chief officers and officials: a very beautiful sight, *pulcherrimo spectaculo* in Bede's words (*HE* iii, 3). Thereafter churches were built and the king gave land and property to found monasteries. In effect, it was under Oswald's rule that the evangelization of Northumbria, blighted by the death of Edwin, came to fruition.

The further importance of Oswald in Bede's view was as a miracle-worker. Already during his lifetime, splinters of wood from the wooden cross, which he had set up before his victory at Heavenfield, were found to have curative powers (*HE* iii, 2). After his defeat at the hands of the still-pagan Mercians, even the dust from the site of his death could effect cures for both humans and animals. The growth of his cult owed something to his brutal dismemberment as a pagan sacrifice (Farmer 1990, 369, n on p 164). In particular, Bede relates several miracles at Bardney abbey, Lincolnshire, where his body was entombed (*HE* iii, 9-13).

Campbell summarizes Oswald's kingship in terms of '*christianissimus*, instrumental in the conversion of his people, *victoriosissimus*, rewarded by God with great conquests,

*miranda sanctitatis*, though defeated and slain, triumphant in miracles' (J Campbell 1979b, 12). He might therefore be seen as a model of good kingship, thus fulfilling one of the purposes of the *Ecclesiastical History* as expressed in the Preface: that if history relates good things of good men, then the thoughtful audience is encouraged to imitate the good. The point is pressed home, that the *History* is for the instruction of King Ceolwulf himself, and those over whom he has been set to rule by divine authority.

Bede may have made one further comment on the nature of kingship. Shortly before AD 716, the Pictish king Nechtan sent messengers to Ceolfrith, abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, seeking guidance on the correct observance of Easter. Ceolfrith appears to have replied at great length; though since our source for his letter is Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (HE v, 21), it is uncertain how much of the text as we have it is Bede, how much Ceolfrith. However that might be, in the first paragraph, there is a reference to an unnamed writer's statement that the world would be in a very happy state if kings were philosophers and philosophers ruled. The ultimate source of the maxim is, of course, Plato's *Republic*, but it was frequently repeated by Early Christian writers (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, 535, n 2). In the present case, Bede is perhaps more likely than Ceolfrith to be the source; but it remains very doubtful whether either of them had ever encountered a philosopher king.

## 4.2 KINGDOMS

### 4.2.1 Introduction: definitions of kingdoms

What we might call the political, ethnic and linguistic situation in Britain was described by the Venerable Bede, writing in the monastery of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in AD 731. He presented this in terms of five languages of 'peoples' or 'nations' (*gentes*: HE i, 1). Since one of these was the scriptural language Latin, in fact only four peoples were involved: Angles, Britons, Picts and Scots/*Scotti* (or Irish). All four were present in northern Britain, and indeed two of them were confined to the north; consequently, Bede's description is highly relevant to this study.

It will be noted that, where the archaeologist's classification is couched in terms of material culture, Bede's is based on language as defining a people (*gens*). But we must also notice that in Bede's usage, the language of the Angles embraced several lesser units which were also referred to as *gentes*: for instance the West Saxons (HE iii, 7), the Mercians (HE iii, 24) and the Northumbrians (HE iii, 24).

These lesser units were essentially political: in fact, kingdoms of varying size and stability. In various written sources we find that kings were related to peoples rather than to territories, so we read of a named *rex Pictorum*, 'of Picts', or *rex Ultrahumbrensiū*, 'of the dwellers north of the Humber'. Consequently, the definition of a particular people was not wholly linguistic. More realistically it was political, so that the Picts were those who, at any one time, paid tribute, and especially military service, to a *rex Pictorum*.

It should not be assumed that the word 'king'—*rex* in most sources—has a simple unitary meaning, which would have been readily understood by both writers of the 7th and 8th centuries and by modern historians. Indeed, Campbell, in his classic survey of Bede's *reges* and *principes*, stresses the 'messiness and ambiguities of Bede's usage', which, he considers, 'may reflect something of the world he described' (J Campbell 1979b, 4).

The essence of Campbell's argument is that while the term *rex* is appropriate to the overlords of the major English kingdoms, it was also applied to rulers of lesser status. Sometimes, however, such persons would have been classed as *principes*. Moreover, in addition to *rex* and *principes* in various contexts, the same persons might have been designated *subregulus*, *dux*, *praefectus*, or *comes*. Above all these were the seven successive outstanding overlords for whom Bede used the term '*Bretwalda*'.

North of the Firth of Forth this richness of vocabulary is missing, and the standard term remains *rex*. But, unfortunately for our understanding, among the very large number of individuals who are recorded by name as undertaking the major regal activities of slaying and being slain, only a few bear the royal prefix. The fact that an individual may be mentioned several times, but only once as *rex*, suggests very strongly that a large number of other persons, who are named but not titled, were nonetheless kings. Indeed, had they not been, why should an annalist have mentioned them?

Ambiguities arise in relation to the kind, size and importance of the territory of individual kings. The very complicated (and frequently contentious) details of kings and kingdoms are explored by MO Anderson (1980), and summaries of the lives of the more important kings are presented in the *Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain (BD)*. Here there is space only for some characteristic cases.

#### 4.2.2 Kingdoms of the 7th and 8th centuries

To begin with Dál Riata: the origin foundation legend of that kingdom goes back, as we have learnt above, to the migration from Ireland of Fergus Mor (son of Erc), who founded a dynastic colony of Scots (illus 1 above) in that part of western Scotland which came to be called Argyll. That colony, Dál Riata, was early divided into three kindred-groups, Cenél Loairn, Cenél nOengusso and Cenél nGabráin. These sometimes appear in the annals: for instance, in AD 719 there was a sea battle between Dunchad *cum genere Gabráin* and Selbach *cum genere Loairn*. There may be a specific reference equating a kindred with a kingship: in 733, Muredach *regnum generis Loairn assumit*, 'assumed kingship of the Loairn kindred'. A region may be specified instead of a kindred, so that Dunchad of *Cenél nGabráin* appears in 721 as *rex Cinn Tire*, that is, modern Kintyre. In 726 he was cast out from his kingdom.

The three kindred-groups continued at least to the late 7th century, when their separate existence was recognized in the *Senchus Fer nAlban*, a survey of the civil, military and naval strength of Dál Riata (Bannerman 1974). Despite this, the concepts of a kingdom and kingship of Dál Riata as a unity was maintained, even if only as a prize to be fought over by rival kings of kindreds. Though Adomnán is not specific on this point, it seems likely that when he tells of the ordaining—but not anointing—of Áedán son of Gabráin as king, this implies the kingship of Dál Riata, not merely of *Cenél nGabráin* (VC iii, 5; discussion by Sharpe 1995, 355-7). That Bede should call 'Aedán king of the Scotti who dwell in Britain' (HE i, 34) is no confirmation, since he was writing over a century later.

Intermittently, however, there are express references to a 'king of Dál Riata': for instance, in c AD 629/630 to Connad Cerr, whose reign, however, lasted only three months. In 700, the death of Fiannamail, grandson of Dunchad, king of Dál Riata, is recorded. In 723, in reference to Selbach on entering the priesthood, the Tigernach annals refer to him as king of Dál Riata. This sporadic list could be extended into later decades, but it could not be intensified.

Among the southern Picts—that is, those who lived south of the great mountain barrier of The Mounth—there was also a two-tier system, consisting of a number of lesser regional kings, sometimes competing among themselves for the over-kingship. A rather late written source suggests that there were as many as seven territories in that area (Henderson 1975a, 8–9 with map 7; 1996, 52; but see also the map in MO Anderson 1980, 127). Two of these were mentioned in annals of the late 7th and mid-8th centuries. Thus Brude, son of Bile, victor of *Bellum Duin Nechtain*, is named twice in the Tigernach annals, in 685 and 693, as king of Fortriu. In 739 Talorggan son of Drostain is designated *rex Athfoille*, that is Atholl.

It might have been expected that an overking would also have been defined in terms of a territorial kingdom, but this appears not to have been so. Perhaps the nearest we come to a larger unit is the mention, in AD 729, of *bellum in regionibus Pictorum*. But overkings are related not to a territory, but to the people. So in 724 Nechtan was ‘king of the Picts’ in the Tigernach annals; and Oengus son of Fergus is called *rex Pictorum* in 729 and 736. The possible relations of an overking and the subking of a territory are brutally revealed by the 739 annal: Talorggan is mentioned because he had been drowned by Oengus.

Among the northern Britons, there was yet another way of designating a king, namely by reference to his principal power centre or citadel. In AD 658, 694 and 752, the deaths are recorded of kings identified as *rex Alo Cluath*, an Irish form appropriate to the annals, derived from Old Welsh (that is British) *Al(t) Clut* (Jackson 1969, 76). The meaning is ‘Rock of Clyde’; but in later centuries it came to be called ‘Dumbarton’ (see below 4.2.3). There are also two other references which lack the contemporary reliability of the annals. Adomnán, writing his *Life of Columba* in the late 7th century, refers to Rhydderch son of Tudwal (c 580–612) who reigned in *petra Cloithe* (VC i, 15), again with the meaning of Rock of Clyde. Also in the late 7th century, Muirchu, writing his *Life of St Patrick*, devotes his final chapter to the saint’s conflict with Coirtech (Coroticus/Ceretic) *regem Aloo [Cluath]* (VP, chap 29; for a fuller account, see Macquarrie 1993).

The twin peaks of Clyde Rock, rising above the river (illus 10), are visually formidable (below, 13.4.2). Even on the basis of hearsay, Bede singled it out as a ‘very strongly defended centre of the Britons’, *civitas Brettonum munitissima* (HE i, 1). Its principal defences were natural, but these were supplemented by built ramparts, probably in the later 6th or the 7th century (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 96–104). Altogether, the effect is a striking icon of Early Historic kingship, and it is not surprising that it should have been adopted as the most appropriate title for a king. It is a pity, therefore, that so potent a symbol should be blurred by the modern practice of glossing *rex Alo Cluath* as ‘king of Strathclyde’: an undefined area, which was not even named as *Sratha Chuade* before the Ulster annal for AD 872.

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A striking icon of Early Historic kingship: the twin peaks of *Alt Clut*, Clyde Rock, the formidable defended centre of the Britons of Strathclyde, rising above the river (Historic Scotland).



This brief survey of kingship north and west of Bernicia has shown that the meaning of the term *rex* was as varied, and perhaps flexible, there as Campbell has shown it to be among the Anglo-Saxons. If it does not necessarily attract the term ‘messiness’, that is perhaps because the evidence is much sparser than in England.

Throughout this section, however, a recurring feature has been the record of brutality which attaches itself to kingship. It is instructive in conclusion, therefore, to draw attention to the condensed biography of Oengus, son of Fergus, king of the Picts, and for a time overlord of Dál Riata as well (*BD*, 187). From this it clearly emerges that to be ‘one of the most powerful and successful of kings’, it was necessary to pursue a career of violence which was both unremitting and successful.

Finally, a brief comment is needed on the highest grade in Campbell’s discussion of Anglo-Saxon kingship (Campbell 1979, 7). Essentially this comprises seven kings, traditionally called Bretwaldas by modern scholars, although the term itself did not appear before the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 829. Bede’s term was actually *imperium*, and he used it of kings who, he believed, had held lordship over several kingdoms (*HE* ii, 5; wider discussion by Yorke 1981; Wormald 1983). The first four kings exercised *imperium* only over southern English kingdoms, so they are irrelevant to the present study. But the final three, Edwin, Oswald and Oswiu, claimed wider lordship from their base in Northumbria. It is not easy to assess the significance of the claim of *imperium* in realistic political and military terms. What is certain is that Cadwallon and Penda successfully challenged Edwin in 633 (*HE* ii, 20); and Penda subsequently overthrew Oswald in 642 (*HE* iii, 9).

In the light of these events, we may recall Stenton’s comment (1947, 34-5) that “‘Bretwalda’ is not a formal style, accurately expressing the position of its bearer...It belongs to the sphere of encomiastic poetry”. It may therefore be compared with the terms ‘battle-leader of Britain’ and ‘lord of Britain’ in the praise-poem in honour of Cadwallon (Bromwich & Jones 1978, 3-4; translation by the kindness of R Geraint Gruffydd). The poem appears to have been composed after the death of Edwin at the hands of the armies of Penda and Cadwallon. The following year, Cadwallon himself was dead.

### 4.2.3 The origins of kingdoms and dynasties

It is not easy to discover the origins of Early Historic kingdoms and dynasties. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the ancestry of most of them has been lost in the mists of prehistory, or has foundered in the even more treacherous swamps of proto-history, represented by genealogies and king-lists. For some time it has been clear to scholars that genealogies were not naive documents, continually checked by recitation before a knowledgeable audience, but rather should be thought of as lists which could be manipulated to serve the interests of the current ruler.

Despite—or perhaps because of—this realization, in subsequent decades much very detailed study has been devoted to analysing such evidence. It cannot be said that the outcome of learned endeavour has been agreement about what may reasonably be accepted as historically reliable. One particularly valuable approach has been that adopted in a series of papers by Miller (1976a; 1976b; 1979) where she has sought to establish the date by which individual kingdoms move from pseudo-history to authentic history.

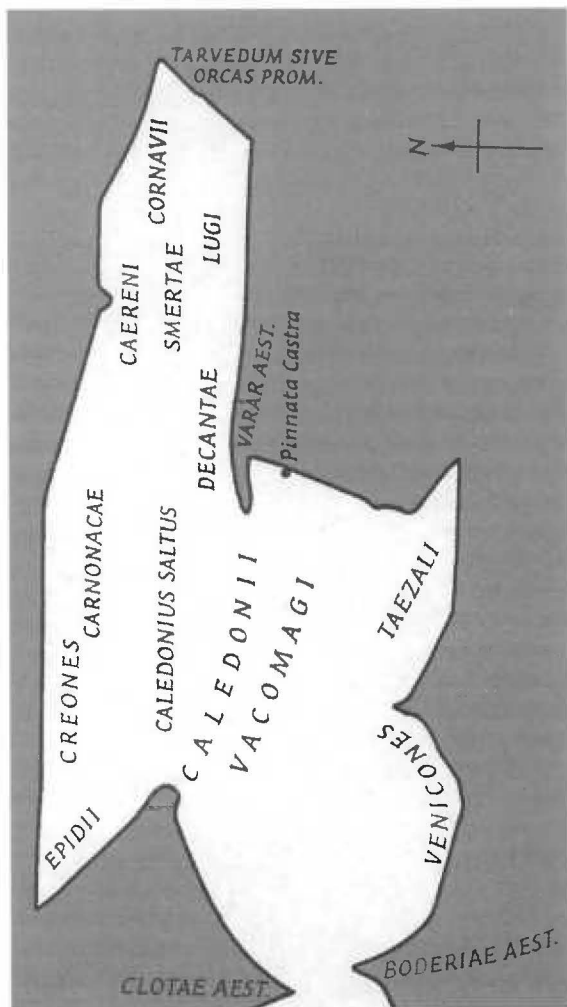
The depth and intensity of scholarly discussion in this field is quite inappropriate to the present survey. It is perhaps surprising that, in the valuable *Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain* (BD), the opening pages are devoted to genealogies and king-lists which are presented without commentary or caveat. They thus convey an impression of objectivity and authority, which is not counterbalanced by the individual biographies which follow. The account which is given here deliberately takes a minimal view of the supposed evidence.

### Early names for tribal groupings

It may be accepted, however, that apart from the Anglo-Saxon and Irish invasions and settlements, the origins of the peoples, sub-groups and dynasties of Early Historic Britain must lie in the proto-history of Roman Britain (illus 11). The term *Britannia* may be presumed to refer to the whole of the large island and minor offshore islands, with a quite separate island of Iverna or Hibernia out to the west. Roman geographers and historians give us the names of tribes in greater or lesser details. (For background maps and discussions: *Map of Roman Britain*, Ordnance Survey 1978; *Historical map & guide, Roman Britain*, Ordnance Survey 1991; *An atlas of Roman Britain*, Jones, B & Mattingly D, 1990).

In northern Britain, however, only four names appear to survive into the Early Historic period. In the east of Britain, maps based on the mid-2nd-century *Geography* of Ptolemy (illus 11) show a people named as *Otadini*, south of the Firth of Forth. These subsequently appear as *Votadini*, and are recognised as ancestors of the Early Historic *Gododdin*. Their fame rests on the 6th-century heroic poem about a military expedition against Northumbria (below, 10.5), but otherwise they are a people without either a king-list or a genealogy.

In the poem, however, they have a poetically illustrious citadel at Din Eidyn, where their king, Mynyddog Mwynfawr, lavishly entertained his warband to a year-long wine-feast before the battle. Din Eidyn is regularly identified with Edinburgh, and specifically the crag-bound Castle Rock is seen as Mynyddog's citadel (Jackson 1969). Limited excavations on this extensive site have yielded evidence for occupation in the Pre-Roman Iron Age, and into the Roman period, but there is very little evidence for the 6th century (Driscoll & Yeoman 1997, 146-156). Certainly the conjectural plan of a hierarchical fort of that period (Alcock 1983, fig 4; 1987, fig 16.7) can be summarily dismissed. On the other hand, given the prominence of major Early Historic forts, it is tempting to suggest that Mynyddog's citadel was on Arthur's Seat on the evidence of its long-range visibility (below 13).



11  
A version of  
Ptolemy's map  
showing the chief  
tribes of the area.

Another Roman-period reference is given to us by Dio Cassius, who mentions a tribe called the *Maeatae*. They may reappear in Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, in a brief account of a battle involving people called *Miathi* (VC i, 8; see note by Sharpe 1995, 269-9, n 81). A location around the head of the Firth of Forth has been suggested from place-names, especially that of Dumyat, probably meaning 'Fort of the Miathi' (RCAHMS 1963, 69-71). This is a fort of several periods of building, perhaps spanning from the later centuries BC to the Early Historic period; but in the absence of excavation, any attempt to determine its dates and status is mere conjecture.

North of the Forth itself, a tribe called *Verturiones* was described in AD 367 by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus as one element among the Picts. The name resurfaces as the Irish name of the Pictish sub-kingdom of Fortriu. When Brude, son of Bile, king of Fortriu, defeated Ecgrith of Northumbria in 685 (below, 10.1), his chosen ground for a battle of great political significance was deep in Strathmore. This may suggest that Strathmore was the heart of Fortriu, though other identifications have been suggested (maps in Wainwright 1955, map 1b; Henderson 1967, fig 9; MO Anderson 1980, 127).

The fourth and most important name is, of course, that of the Picts themselves. They were first mentioned in AD 297 by the panegyrist Eumenius as enemies of the *Britanni*, along with the *Hiberni*. Throughout the 4th century, there are several brief mentions by other classical writers, but except for creating a picture of fierce barbarians, raiding the Roman province by land and sea, they contribute nothing to the present discussion. It has been well said that '*Picti* was coined in the 3rd century as a non-specific name for the northern barbarians in Britain'. It may have been understood as including peoples as far north as the Pentland Firth, but not the Northern Isles; and as far west as Skye, but perhaps not the Outer Isles. To the south, it is often considered that the northern shore of the Forth was the boundary. However, it appears that in Bede's day, the Pictish language was spoken south of the Forth around the Roman Antonine Wall (*HE* i, 12). This might imply some long-standing ethnic presence there as well. This would be consistent with the fact that when the Northumbrians wished to establish a mission to the Picts (doubtless with political as well as religious intentions), they founded it not north of the Forth, but at *Aebbecurning*, Abercorn (Lothian), by its southern shore (*HE* iv, 26) (MO Anderson 1987, 7; Wainwright 1955b; Henderson 1967; on Skye, Sharpe 1995, 293-4, n 147).

### The founding of *Alt Clut*, the stronghold on the Clyde (illus 10)

Our knowledge of the founding of the kingship of *Alt Clut*, Clyde Rock, Dumbarton, is beset with uncertainties and ambiguities. If we can believe Muirchu's statement that the Coroticus whose soldiers were castigated by St Patrick was king of *Alt Clut*, then the dynasty goes back at least to Patrick's time. That may have been the later 5th century; but recent opinion would not exclude an earlier date (O'Cróinín 1995, 24-5). Again, if we accept that Adomnán, writing at the end of the 7th century, had good evidence that Rhydderch son of Tudwal was king of Clyde Rock, then we can be sure that the dynasty was well-established by the end of the 6th century. But we can only really be sure for the 7th century.

If the written evidence is uncertain, it must be admitted that the archaeological evidence from Clyde Rock may be considered as ambiguous. The earliest material is a scatter of potsherds of high quality with dates spanning from the later 1st to the 4th century AD.

This might be interpreted as evidence that the Rock had been inhabited, sporadically, or continuously, over that period, more probably by a British chieftain than as a Roman military outpost

The weight of the artefactual evidence, however, lies in the 6th and 7th centuries, while radiometric evidence for the construction of a rampart points to the 7th century. The excavators chose, therefore, to regard the potsherds of the 1st to 4th centuries as an example of the 'reliquary' occurrence of Roman material on post-Roman sites in northern and western Britain; a token, in effect, of lingering respect for the Roman Empire (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 113-6).

With one exception, the extent of the kingdom can only be conjectured on the basis of topographic possibility. Clyde Rock is at the confluence of the Leven with the Clyde. The Leven flows out of Loch Lomond which provides a water route of some 25 miles/40 km into the Highlands. A further 4 miles/6 km beyond the head of the loch, a narrow valley skirts *Clach nam Breatann*, 'Stone of the Britons', a dramatic rock formation which traditionally marked the northern limit of the kingdom.

To the south, there were no such natural markers, but up-river the Clyde gave access to fertile lowlands and ultimately upland grazing. Below the Rock, the Clyde opens to a wide estuary, flanked with sea-lochs which offered good communications, a rich sea-harvest, and pockets and larger areas of rich land. Much of this area may have been occupied by the tribe of the *Dumnonii* (or *Damnonii* according to Ptolemy); but to state this is not to suggest that the territory of the king of *Alt Clut* was inherited from the Roman tribe.

### Intrusive peoples: *Scotti* and Angles

If we turn to the settlements of invading peoples, these were: in the west, those of the Goidelic-speaking Scots (*Scotti*) from Ireland, presumably following the expulsion of the Picts and Britons; and, initially in the south-east—and generally at the expense of the Britons—the settlement of Germanic-speaking Angles.

For the migration of the *Scotti*, there is a conventional date around AD 500 for the ancestor legend which attributes the invasion to the sons of Erc, and especially to Fergus Mor. 'No Scot ever set foot on British soil save from a vessel that had put out from Ireland', and 'three times fifty men passed over in the fleet with the sons of Erc' (Bannerman 1974, 40).

The legend probably presents a reasonable account of a dynastic take-over of the land which came to be called Dál Riata. On the other hand, the movement of settlers across the narrow seas from north-east Ireland is likely to have been spread over decades if not centuries. One reason for such an interpretation is the scarcity of Pictish place-names in Dál Riata. This might be interpreted as evidence for a mass extermination of Picts by *Scotti* around AD 500, but it is at least as likely that a long-term infiltration had steadily reduced the proportion of Pictish-speakers in the population (basic evidence and discussion: Nicolaisen, 1975, 2-5, with maps 3-5; 1976).

Place-names also suggest a settlement of Goidelic or Gaelic speakers in south-west Scotland. The principal evidence for this is a dense concentration of names containing the element *shiabh*, a hill, in the Rhinns of Galloway (Nicolaisen 1975, 4 with map 4a).

The particular interest of this is that it reveals a folk movement which has left no record either in tradition or in historical sources. This goes some way to support the suggestion made in the case of Dál Riata that folk movements may be quite independent of dynastic invasions.

As we have seen above, the *Scotti* of Dál Riata were divided into three kindred-groups: Cenél Loairn, Cenél nOengusso and Cenél nGabráin. Their respective territories were roughly: Loairn on the islands of Mull, Coll and Tiree, and the mainland both sides of Loch Linnhe and the Firth of Lorn; nOengusso on Islay; and nGabráin on the Kintyre peninsula, the islands of Arran and Bute, and the mainland east of Loch Long. But these territories were disputed, as was the overkingship, and probably to a greater extent than the annals record.

Despite this, Scottish Dál Riata has sometimes been regarded as a uniform 'conquest society' or a colonial off-shoot of north-east Ireland. But Ó Corráin has cautioned that 'one could expect the institutions of the homeland... to have undergone divergent development' (1980, 179). In the case of Scottish Dál Riata, just such divergence can be inferred from both archaeological and written evidence. In both Ireland and Scotland, circular enclosures of earth and stone were erected; but the Scottish ones were in general both more compact and more formidably defensive (Alcock & Alcock 1987 132-4). The Dál Riata settlers had inherited these circular forts (or 'duns' in archaeological terminology) from the earlier inhabitants, whether Britons or Picts, and they continued both to use existing duns and build new ones (below, 13).

As for written evidence: the annals reveal that in Dál Riata and also in southern Pictland, action against fortified places was a major feature of warfare. Most frequently the records are of a siege, *obsessio*, and less frequently of a burning, ravaging or destruction, *combustio*, *vastatio*, *distructio*. In Ireland, by contrast, a military engagement is most commonly called a battle, *bellum*, a term which is only rarely used in Scottish entries. The difference in military terminology is obviously consistent with the character of the Scottish duns as compared with the less-imposing circular enclosures of Ireland. Since duns had been built both before the Irish migration to Dál Riata, and also outside that kingdom, we may conclude that the Irish colonial society had modified its methods of warfare and defence by imitating the natives. Moreover, this apparently ready assimilation by the incomers of a major social activity—the building, besieging and destroying of duns—may be seen as an augury for the 9th-century amalgamation of the kingdoms of Dál Riata and of the Picts into the kingdom of the Scots.

### The creation of Bernicia

Turning now to Bernicia: the foundation legend of that dynasty, as related in *Historia Brittonum*, refers to one Ida, 'who joined Bernicia to Deira', in effect creating the kingdom of Northumbria. There is also mention of a fortress called Dinguoaroy (*HB*, 61 & 63), but more normally known as Bamburgh (illus 12). Bede gives the date for the founding of this as AD 547 (*HE* v, 24), presumably computing it from the reign-lengths of Ida and his successors. Dumville, however, has drawn attention to a chronicle-fragment which describes Ida as 'son of Eoppa son of Eossa. That Oessa (sic) first came to Britain' (Dumville 1977, 312-4). This suggests that the family had been established in Britain, presumably from Germany, for two generations before Ida's reign.

There is much confusion here, not always readily acknowledged. For a start, the amal-

gamation of Deira and Bernicia was a matter of dispute into the second half of the 7th century: for example, the conflict of Oswiu and Oswine in AD 651. If we concentrate on Bernicia, we must recognize that in the mid-6th century, Bamburgh was at the very front-line of Anglian expansion against the Britons, as is demonstrated by the *Historia Brittonum* account of vigorous and fluctuating warfare, including a siege of Holy Island (Lindisfarne) (*HB*, 63). In so far as cemeteries with furnished graves can be used as an index of Anglian settlement, the excavated examples show that movement north of the Tees valley, the supposed frontier between Deira and Bernicia, had made little progress in the 6th century (Sherlock & Welch 1992, 2-9, with Table 1 and fig 2).



12  
A view of  
Bamburgh, centre  
of Northumbrian  
power.

If, however, we take the mid-6th-century front-line at Bamburgh, and move northward, some interesting conclusions arise about the character of the Anglian advance and its relationship with the Britons—probably, that is, the southernmost of the Gododdin. We have already seen that Bamburgh had originally a British name, *Din Guoaro*y or *Guaire*. Following along the coast, the Anglian royal centres of Lindisfarne and Dunbar had British names, respectively *Broninis* and *Dynbaer* (*VW*, chaps 36 & 38). Inland, Yeavering certainly, and Milfield possibly, also had British-derived names: *Ad Gefrin* and *Maelmin* (*HE* ii, 14). To these should be added two royal or noble centres where British halls were supplanted by Anglian ones: Sprouston in the Tweed valley and Doon Hill in East Lothian. This seems to indicate that in Bernicia the Angles largely took over the power structure of the Gododdin.

This take-over of British power-centres—and presumably their associated administrative, political and social networks—contrasts strongly with Bede's statement that Æthelfrith (592-617), the third king of the Bernician dynasty, 'ravaged the Britons more widely than any of the English kings' (*HE* i, 34). This may, however, be a reflection of Bede's hostility to the Britons as 'heretics', *perfidii* (*HE* ii, 2), rather than a statement of historical fact.

The climax of the Bernician advance to the Firth of Forth is usually dated to AD 638 by the entry in the *Annals of Ulster*: *obsessio Etin*, 'the siege of Etin'. This very probably refers to Din Eidyn, the starting point of the Heroic-age campaign of the Gododdin, and usually identified with Castle Rock, Edinburgh. It is reasonably regarded as one of the power centres of the Votadini, the British tribe well-known in the Roman period. But we may ask, how secure is its identification with an Anglian advance in the earlier 7th century?

Even ignoring technical problems such as the historical reliability of the *Annals* in the first half of the 7th century, and uncertainty as to how any date was computed, the annal does not tell us who were in Etin—Britons, Picts, Angles—who were the besiegers—Picts, Angles, Britons—and most crucial of all, who won? Altogether, this is a very slender item of historical or quasi-historical evidence on which to found large interpre-

tations in politico-military history. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, recent large-scale excavations at Edinburgh's Castle Rock have yielded little relevant evidence (Driscoll & Yeoman 1997).



So much for developments before Bede's own day. In AD 731 he claimed that there was a general state of peace, but subsequent politico-military developments show that this was fragile. South of the Forth-Clyde isthmus it is true that the supremacy of Northumbria was established and unthreatened. This made possible expansion into south-west Scotland, presumably at the expense of the British kingdom of Rheged. The expansion is marked especially by the establishment of an Anglian bishopric at the ancient British religious centre of Whithorn (see below 14.2.3). Meanwhile, in and around the Clyde valley, the kingdom of Strathclyde was involved intermittently in warfare with the Picts and the *Scotti* of Dál Riata, but essentially it appears to have maintained its integrity.

#### 4.2.4 The end of a separate Pictish identity

North of the isthmus, however, a more lively and fluid scene appears. In addition to frequent internal dynastic conflicts among the *Scotti* and the Picts—and possibly minor battles between the two peoples in which named kings and other potentates were slain—the annals record four major battles, at which major man-slayings occurred, between AD 731 and 741. Thereafter, the annals are less informative about events in north Britain because of the cessation of information from the Iona scriptorium. It is difficult to believe, however, that the conflicts between the Picts and the *Scotti* had ceased. From AD 794, however, the main concern of the annals is with the ravaging of the Gentiles, that is, the Vikings.

In the middle decades of the 9th century, however, Pictland lost its national identity at the hands of the Scots. The detailed motives and actions are obscure, but a contributory factor may have been that of the Viking pressures: raiding along the west coasts and the islands providing a reason for some folk movement, while inland penetration from the east coast may have weakened Pictish military power.

Amid the general obscurity, three records or purported records may be highlighted, but they do not add up to a continuous historical account:

- 1 In AD 736 the Pictish king, Oengus, son of Fergus, laid waste the territory of Dál Riata, seized its principal stronghold, Dunadd, and bound in chains the two sons of the Dál Riata king (*AU*, 735). Oengus appears to have remained overlord of Dál Riata until about 750.
- 2 In AD 789, Constantine, son of Fergus (Castantin son of Uргуист) assumed the kingship of Pictland; and in 811 he added the kingship of Dál Riata (MO Anderson 1980, 192-5). He died in 820, and was succeeded by his brother Hungus (Unuist) until 834.
- 3 According to List D of the *Chronicles of the Kings of Scotland*, Kenneth (Kynat, Cinead) son of Alpín, destroyed the Picts, having with wonderful promptitude led the Scots out of Argyll into the land of the Picts (AO Anderson 1922; MO

Anderson 1990, 289). This, and other notices of Kenneth's acquisition of Pictland, are far from being contemporary records, and little weight should be placed on the suggestions that the Scots moved *en masse* into Pictland, or that the Picts themselves were totally annihilated.

Nonetheless, it would seem that the Pictish language was either deliberately suppressed or fell into disuse. This is most clearly demonstrated by the distribution of place-names in eastern Scotland. The Scottish/Gaelic settlement names containing the element *baile* came vastly to outnumber the Pictish element *pit* (see maps in McNeill & MacQueen 1996, 51, 60); moreover, there is a striking absence of Pictish annals or chronicles.

One other supposed witness to the Scottish suppression of Pictish culture has, however, recently proved to be false. Sometime in the 9th century, two major changes occurred on the Pictish carved stones: the characteristic Pictish symbols (discussed below 21.4) no longer appeared on the stones (23.2); and the lively Pictish depictions of warriors and riders were replaced by static, highly stylized figures. These changes have been attributed to the destruction of the Picts after the accession of Kenneth mac Alpin in AD 840. Recently, however, an inscription carved on the Dupplin cross, above the royal centre of Forteviot, has demonstrated that these stylistic changes had already occurred around, or even before, AD 820 (see 23.2 below).



From this overall survey of kingships and kingdoms, it may appear that the principal activity of kings was to initiate wars, especially for the conquest of territory and the overthrow of rival dynasties; and to lead armies in the field. We may also note in Celtic areas the building of fortified places. This is a subordinate activity in the written records, but a primary one in the archaeological evidence. To some extent, this impression derives from the 'kings and battles' character of the annals; but even the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and some saints' lives place much emphasis on warfare. More peaceful aspects of kingship will appear most clearly in later chapters on aspects of religion.

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## POLITICS TWO: RESOURCES OF KINGSHIP

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### 5.1 MATERIAL RESOURCES

When we ask what resources these early historic kings could muster in order to maintain their power and status, we must accept that, within the chronological and geographical limits of the present survey, the information is, as we have seen, very fragmentary. In the case of written evidence, we have to tease out unwritten implications which would have been immediately comprehended by contemporaries. The archaeological evidence must also be deeply interrogated.

#### 5.1.1 Land grants

Because the written sources are predominantly ecclesiastical, we frequently hear of kings giving land to found monasteries. Obvious examples are Oswy's donation of 12 estates for monasteries (and also his infant daughter) in return for victory over the pagan Penda of Mercia (*HE* ii, 24). The frequency with which the later 7th-century Northumbrian kings made such donations has been emphasised (eg Wood 1995, 2-5): a very pious king such as Aldfrith might even give land in exchange for a holy book (*VBA*, 201).

Grants to noble warriors are less frequently mentioned, but a clear example is that of Benedict Biscop, first abbot of Monkwearmouth. A man of noble birth, and a warrior, he was a *minister* (? officer, official) of King Oswiu, who granted him a landed estate appropriate to his rank or status, *possessionem terrae suo gradui competentem* (*VBA*, 1). At the age of 25, however, Benedict gave up military for heavenly warfare, and abandoned home, family and country. Bede's interests were obviously not those of a modern social historian, and his brief account does not make it clear at what stage in Benedict's original military career he received the land-grant from the king (commentary by Charles-Edwards 1976).

On the whole, it would seem that the land was the king's to donate as he chose. There is evidence, however, that the king's councillors might be involved. A minor instance of this occurred when Aldfrith and his councillors gave Benedict three hides of land in exchange for two richly decorated silk cloaks (Plummer 1896, I, 373; *VBA*, 9). Far more significant is Stephen's account of the dedication of Wilfrid's church at Ripon. Apart from the public splendour of the occasion in the presence of Ecgrith and his brother Ælfwine, Wilfrid read out clearly a list of the lands which the kings had donated to him, with the consent and signatures of bishops and all the chief men (*cum consensu et subscriptione episcoporum et omnium principum VW*, 17). As Wormald has indicated (1984, 19 with n 51), this is evidence for the use of charters in Northumbria, despite the lack of actual surviving examples. There is an even more pointed reference, in Bede's *Letter to Egbert*, to the improper acquisition by lay persons of hereditary rights to land by royal gift. These might even be confirmed by the signatures (*subscriptione*) of bishops, abbots and lay potentates (Plummer 1896, I, 415; Whitelock 1979, 805).

Presumably the purpose of the grants was that the monasteries should maintain themselves from the produce of the land. Correspondingly, the king and his followers were supported from the fruits of the lands which he held, and through which he made periodic progresses or circuits. Bede mentions Edwin riding with his court among his cities, estates and provinces, *inter civitates sive villas aut provincias suas cum ministris*. For Bede the emphasis is placed on Roman-style pomp: the carrying before the king, even in peacetime, of a military standard of kind known to the Romans as *tufa*, and to the English as *thuuf* (illus 13). Modern scholarly opinion, however, is unusually critical of Bede on this matter (Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 80-81).

### 5.1.2 Food renders

Stephen, in his *Life of Wilfrid*, also relates how the king and queen had been going around with worldly display and daily rejoicing, through cities, forts and villages, *per civitates et castellas vicosque* (VW, 39). We may infer that, for both Edwin and Ecgrith, the display and rejoicing were intended to make the physical person of the king highly visible throughout his kingdom: a very necessary act in a period of poor communications. But Stephen also refers to daily feasts or banquets, *cotidie epulantes*. The evidence of both Germanic and Celtic poetry reveals that a major purpose of such feasting was to fulfill the royal obligation of hospitality to his followers: *Beowulf* and *The Wanderer* would be Anglo-Saxon models, as would *Y Gododdin* and the poems of Taliesin in a northern British context.

An even more material purpose was served by the progress or circuit through a hierarchy of royal centres. To the three classes mentioned above, we might add the *urbs regis*, as probably the equivalent of *castellum*. Stephen mentions two examples, namely *Broninis*, Lindisfarne (VW, 36) (col illus I.3), and *Dynbaer*, Dunbar (VW, 38) (illus 69 below). These royal centres presumably acted as gathering points for the food renders which sustained the whole apparatus of royalty.

These renders are best known from later, but traditional, customary laws in Ireland and Wales (Charles-Edwards 1989). They are sometimes called food-gifts; but this conceals the fact that they were obligatory tribute. In Britain they are best known in the Welsh Laws, the so-called 'Laws of Hywel Dda'. In the form in which these are preserved, they are no earlier than the 13th century, but a recent review stresses that there exists a small core of material put together about the mid-10th century, and, moreover, that lawyers were slow to discard obsolete material (Jenkins 1986, xi). This does not make it easy for scholars who are not themselves expert in legal history to establish the earliest strata.

In relation to food-gifts or food-renders, however, there are two pointers to their early beginnings, probably earlier than Hywel's own date. The first is that taxes in kind, which



13  
Kingly symbols?  
The Portsoy  
'whetstone' and  
the Sutton Hoo  
'standard'.

is what food-renders are, have their roots in a pre-monetary economy. This is a comment on origins, and it does not preclude continuity into later centuries. Secondly, among Anglo-Saxon laws, we have in the Laws of Ine a clause (Ine 70.1) which lists details of a food-rent in terms of a range of animals, both domestic and wild, and vegetable and animal products both raw and processed, which can readily be matched in the Welsh Laws (Richards 1954, 72-3; Jenkins 1986, 128-9). The Ine laws are datable AD 688 x 694 (Whitelock 1979, 398).

In the Welsh Laws, the renders are specified in great detail, and as with the Ine clause, cover a great range of domestic and wild, processed and raw, products. They are formally divided into a summer and a winter 'food-gift'. This is not merely to take full advantage of the seasonal produce of the land; it is also governed by the impossibility of preserving such produce for many months. One purpose of the feasting mentioned by Stephen in his account of Ecgfrith's circuits or progresses was simply the consumption of the twice yearly 'food-gift'; in a period of poor transport, it was easier for king and court to move to the food than the other way round.

14  
King's supporters:  
two senior foot-  
soldiers, a detail  
from the Dupplin  
cross (*Historic  
Scotland*).



In northern Britain, although it is possible to depict the later working of the system of renders and services at royal centres (GRJ Jones 1977), we appear to have only one hint as early as the 7th century. In 729, the Iona/Ulster annals record a battle in an internal Pictish power struggle, in which three *exactores* of the defeated king were slain. The word has been translated as 'tax-gatherers' (AO Anderson 1922; 1990), which would no doubt have been correct in a Classical context; but in 7th-century Pictland, 'tribute-enforcers' would seem a more appropriate rendering. It should be added that the patronym of each of the three was stated, implying that they were noblemen. This is a telling example of how a king's resources might be maintained.

### 5.1.3 Military service

Another of the major resources available to kings, and documented in a written source, was, of course, the right to levy organized bodies of men for military expeditions or hostings (see below 11.3) (illus 14). The actual evidence is known only from Dál Riata, in the *Senchus FernAlban* (Bannerman 1974). Appropriately for a kingdom of islands and coastlands, the *Senchus* also included details of an expeditionary force for sea-voyaging.

It would seem that troops were organized in multiples of units of five men, that is 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 (by far the commonest), 60 (once) and 120 (once). It is a reasonable inference that there was a hierarchy of leaders corresponding to the relative size of units, and appropriately a rather comparable hierarchy can be

discerned in Irish society (Bannerman 1974, 134-7). What is not clear is whether these leaders were only responsible for organizing their units, or whether they were also required to arm and feed them. Later medieval experience in Scotland would suggest that the latter was very likely.

There is also a tantalizingly brief reference to a commander of a Pictish military unit in the *Life of Columba*. Adomnán relates how Artbranan, an elderly pagan, came to Skye to be baptised by the saint (*VC*, I.33). His status is given as *Geonae primarius cohortis*. There is much discussion of these three words (most recent in Sharpe 1995, n 149). It seems reasonable to think of Artbranan as the leader of a military unit, perhaps even of a royal warband. It has further been suggested that the adjective *Geonae* refers to the Pictish province of Ce, that is north-east Scotland.

#### 5.1.4 King's works

Finally in this survey of material resources, we must go beyond the limits of the written evidence and ask what inferences may be drawn from the major additional source—the silent witness of archaeology. The principal field monuments known north of Bernicia were the stone-built forts, of very varied strength, size and complexity of plan (below 13.2). It is reasonable to believe that these had been commissioned by persons of correspondingly varied status and ambitions: persons whom we may conveniently class as potentates (Alcock 1988a). An example from the written evidence comes from the Iona/Ulster annals: 'Dunollie was built by Selbach', king of Dál Riata.

To build such forts, kings needed: access to quarrying and timber-felling services; carrying services, often over difficult ground; provision for the smithing of thousands of iron nails (at forts such as Burghead, Moray, and Dundurn, Perthshire: 8.2 below); and skilled stone-masons and carpenters. The layout of some forts in relation to terrain would require skilled military engineers; and any large project would have demanded managerial skills, which may, however, be considered as implicit in kingship (Alcock 1988a, espec 26).

In Northumbria, the corresponding kings' works were the erection of large timber enclosures and elaborate halls (15 below). These would have required architects' skills in designing and controlling layouts; carpenters' skills in erecting the buildings; and other labouring and carrying services. Less obvious is the need for royal rights to large areas of forest; and the woodland management skills to produce long straight beams of large scantling.



At this point we may reasonably ask: by what right did kings claim and enforce this large suite of food-renders and manpower services? In the case of the invader-dynasties of Northumbria and Dál Riata, it might be answered: by right of conquest. But similar royal claims were enforced among the Britons and the Picts. Moreover, in relation to the military needs of manpower and fort-building, these presumably had their roots in prehistoric, preliterate centuries. This would also apply to the demands of potentates for the necessities of subsistence, and no less the desirable luxuries revealed in the archaeological records. The origins of all these are lost; and even in the semi-literate society of Early Historic Britain, we can only glimpse them fitfully.

## 5.2 PERSONNEL: THE KING'S SUPPORTERS

We may now consider the persons, both at court and beyond it, who supported and ministered to the king and his activities. The overwhelming majority of the personnel who supported the king were, of course, male (illus 14). Only a minority of them had royal family connections; but it appears that the personal qualities of a king might act as a honey pot for recruitment. Bede gives us an encomium on the regal qualities of King Oswine: namely, his character, appearance, speech, and bounty to both nobles and commoners. As a result, even the noblest of men came from almost every kingdom to enter his service, *ad eius ministerium* (*HE* iii, 14).

### 5.2.1 Female roles

Although the majority of the king's personnel were male we look first at those who were primary among the supporters: the female members of the royal family. This is immediately obvious in the social field. Stephen reports that Ecgrith, going on a progress around his cities and other chief places with daily feasting and rejoicing, was accompanied by his queen (*VW*, 39). In an Anglo-Saxon/Germanic context we may surmise that an important role for the queen was dispensing ale and mead to the male courtiers. This at least was so in the case of Wealhtheow, Hrothgar's queen in *Beowulf* (lines 607-628 and 1159-1174, SAJ Bradley 1995, 427-8; 442-3).

At a lower, but still noble level, we may cite the nobleman's wife, who had been suffering from a severe illness for nearly 40 days. Miraculously cured by Bishop John of Beverley, she immediately took a goblet (*poculum*: ? of wine) to the bishop, and ministered to him and the company throughout the meal (*HE* v, 4). Apart from the echoes of a Heroic-Age feast, the miracle itself is seen by Bede as recalling the healing of St Peter's mother-in-law by Jesus (Matthew, 8:14-15).

A deeper secular significance attaches, however, to the diplomatic role of wives in establishing alliances between kingdoms, and also between noble families. This has been extensively examined, both in England and on the Continent by P Stafford (1983). Particularly relevant to 7th-century England is her broad comment that 'women were given and taken, sometimes forcibly, as hostages and sealers of peace...The violence of battles and murder is rarely far below the surface of such marriages' (Stafford 1983, 44).

Some examples from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* may illustrate these comments. The first is that of Æthelberht of Kent, who sought a cross-channel alliance with the important Frankish kingdom of Charibert by marrying his daughter Bertha. In northern Britain, a comparable act was that of Edwin of Northumbria, who sought an alliance with Kent through marriage with Æthelburh, daughter of Æthelberht and sister of the then reigning king, Eadbald. In each case, the king was a pagan and the bride a Christian, so arrangements had to be made for the Christian practices of the bride and her attendants. In each case, this led eventually to the conversion of the king and kingdom (*HE* i, 25-6; ii, 9).

Marriages for dynastic purposes were not always successful, let alone happy, as the family of Penda of Mercia makes abundantly clear. Penda's sister was married to Cenwealh, king of the West Saxons. He repudiated her and married another woman: not surprisingly, Penda drove him from his kingdom (*HE* iii, 7). Cyneburh, one of Penda's daughters, was married to Oswiu of Northumbria: but this did not prevent

Penda from holding Oswiu's son Ecgfrith as a hostage; nor from engaging in a campaign—unsuccessful as it happened—to exterminate Oswiu and his kingdom (*HE* iii, 24). Despite these hostile acts, Penda's son Peada married Oswiu's daughter Alhflaed, and was given Southern Mercia, presumably as a dowry: but the following year, Peada was slain, allegedly through the treachery of his own wife (*HE* iii, 24).

The conflict between Mercia and Northumbria led to another example of an alliance involving a royal girl who had no say in what was in effect a contract with the Almighty. The Christian Oswiu, fearing defeat at the hands of the pagan Penda, pledged his newly-born daughter to eternal virginity in return for divine support. He also pledged twelve landed estates for the founding of monasteries. In the event, the pagans fled or were slain; the maiden became first a pupil, and ultimately a teacher, at the famous monastery at Whitby.

### 5.2.2 Male supporters: ranks and titles

Amongst the men who gave support and service to kings were counsellors, battle-leaders, ministers and other functionaries. These may now be described in more detail. For the most part, the evidence cited here is to be found in the pages of Bede and Stephen, and far less frequently in the Irish/Scottish Annals. It is not clear whether this is because of the normal terseness of the Annals, or because the social and administrative structures of the *Scotti* and Picts were less elaborate than those of Northumbria. (For a wider study of titles in Anglo-Saxon England as a whole, but by definition excluding the Celtic lands, Thacker 1981).

What is largely revealed to us is a military hierarchy. Immediately we encounter a problem in translation, which requires a statement of policy. Two frequent terms normally regarded as denoting rank are *comes* and *miles*. Sometimes, indeed, they appear together, with a suggestion that the first is higher in status than the second. The basic meaning of *comes* is 'companion', and hence it may refer to a companion on a journey (*HE* iii, 30; iv, 25). High secular rank is clear in some instances, however. Sigebert, king of Essex, was assassinated by two of his own kinsmen, *propinqui*, who are also called *comites* (*HE* iii, 22). Some *comites* had the status to invite the distinguished bishop St John of Beverley to dedicate churches, and to entertain him afterwards (*HE* v, 4 & 5). It may be inferred in these cases that a *comes* may have the landed wealth to donate land for the endowment of a church.

*Miles* is a word which significantly changed its meaning between the Classical and High Medieval periods, from 'common soldier, infantryman', to 'man-at arms, knight'. In the first two books of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede normally uses it in the sense of 'troops, soldiers' regardless of rank (*HE* i, 2 & 12; ii, 2). Not surprisingly, in the Christian period, it is used especially for the warriors of Christ. Thus Oswald and Egbert are both called *miles Christi* (*HE* iv, 14; v, 9). There is also an assumption among translators that normally Bede's *miles* was a man of rank, but lower than that of *comes*.

The terms are commonly rendered in modern translations as *gesith* and *thegn*, no doubt because this is how they are rendered in the Old English version of the *Ecclesiastical History*. But this was composed a century and a half after the Latin original, and almost certainly in a Mercian, not a Northumbrian milieu (Whitelock 1962). Can we be sure that Anglo-Saxon society was so homogeneous and static that the Old English version truly reflected Bede's meaning? Given the depth of scholarly discussion (eg Loyn 1962;

Charles-Edwards 1976), can we ourselves claim to appreciate fully the meaning of *gesith* and *thegn*. Two minor problems may also be cited. When the Tigernach annal for AD 719 relates the death of warriors ranked as *comites* in a sea-battle between two Dál Riata kindreds, the annalist was not thinking in terms of *gesith*. And *comes* may also be translated as *gefera* (Loyn 1956, 534; compare Colgrave 1956; 1985, 189 in relation to the OE version of the Life of Guthlac). Possible terms for a noble warrior are further discussed in the context of the aftermath of battle in Chapter 10.7.

In view of these comments, and other problems over the rendering of *miles* as *thegn*, the following practice is adopted here. The Latin of the original is always cited, accompanied by an English translation which attempts to convey the status and activity or function of the individual, having regard to the circumstances in which he is mentioned. It is hoped that the reader will be enlightened without being misled.

At the summit of the Northumbrian hierarchy are two commanders who led expeditions against the Picts (*HE* v, 24). In AD 698, *Berctred dux regius Nordanhymbrorum*, ‘the king’s commander’ was killed by the Picts. In 711, *Berctfrid praefectus*, ‘commander, general’, fought the Picts. *Praefectus* is a rather general term for a person put in charge of some body or enterprise. The particular interest in these two cases is that the king himself does not take the field. The king in 698 was Aldfrith, noted for his pious and scholarly deeds rather than for military activity, and prepared to send his commander-in-chief to read a lesson to the Picts—albeit unsuccessfully. In 711, king Osred was only about 14 years old: too immature, in modern eyes, to lead an army; but we must recall that Guthlac recruited his own war-band (or robber-band) at about the same age (Colgrave 1956; 1985, 81).

Berctfrid had already appeared in *c* AD 706 as *Berthfrithus secundus a rege princeps*, ‘first man after the king’, and *regis princeps*, ‘king’s first man’ (*VW*, 60). Berthfrith himself may have been the son of the Berhtred slain by the Picts in 698, and kinsman of the *sub-regulus* Beornhaeth, who fought the Picts with Ecgrith in the 670s (below). This suggests a noble, though not regal, dynasty at the highest level, especially of military rank, in Northumbria.

The term *sub-regulus*, ‘under-king’, may indeed seem an exalted one when used of Beornhaeth, *audaci sub-regulo*, ‘courageous sub-king’, supporting Ecgrith with a small band against a vast army of the Picts (*VW*, 19). But this disparity of forces is a regular topos of Early Historic battle accounts. This observation need not, of itself, depreciate the status of *sub-regulus*. But in his account of the dedication of Wilfrid’s church at Ripon, Stephen cites in a single phrase *abbatis praefectisque et sub-reguli totiusque dignitatis personae*, ‘abbots and chief officials and under-kings, and all dignitaries’ (*VW*, 17). It is possible, of course, that Stephen’s wording has as its major purpose the exaltation of his hero Wilfrid at the expense of other important people, both secular and religious.

While *princeps*, in the singular, has been cited above as referring to an outstanding individual, it may also be used more loosely in the plural, *principes*, to mean ‘the chief, or leading, men’. Thus the land-grants for the building of Wilfrid’s church at Ripon were made over the signatures *episcoporum et omnium principorum*, ‘of the bishops and all the leading men’ (*VW*, 17). In AD 706 an invitation was given by Archbishop Beorhtwald to Osred, king of Northumbria, and all his bishops and abbots and the chief men of his whole realm, *totius regni eius principibus* (*VW*, 60), to attend a synod.

*Minister* is another word of various meanings, all conveying some sense of service to a superior. Even if the Old English translator of the *Ecclesiastical History* does use *thegn*, or even *cyninges thegnum*, this does not help us to understand either the social standing or the functions implied by *minister*.

In fact the word may apply to anyone who serves or attends or ministers to a superior. At one level, we hear of Edwin going on progresses or circuits accompanied in comprehensive terms *cum ministris*, perhaps implying all his officers and officials (*HE* ii, 16). Elsewhere, even at court, there may be a division of ranks; so Oswald translated the heavenly word of the Irish-speaking Aidan to his *ducibus ac ministris* (*HE* iii, 3). At the other end of the social spectrum, the anonymous author of the Life of Cuthbert equates *comitis minister* with *comitis servus*, that is, 'servant' or even 'slave' (*VCA*, iv, 7). Finally, the special case of ministers of religion should be briefly noticed: Pope Gregory sent *plures Verbi ministros*, 'many ministers of the Holy Word', to assist Augustine in his mission (*HE* v, 24).

We have already encountered a *praefectus* as a military commander leading the Northumbrian army against the Picts (*HE* v, 24). There is also an uninformative mention of a *praefectus Egfridi regis* in a miracle-healing story in Bede's prose Life of Cuthbert (*VCB*, xv). But a *praefectus* might also be an important civil official. Bede reports, for instance, that the first conversion made by Paulinus in the kingdom of Lindsey was the *praefectus* of *Lindocolinae civitatis*, the former Roman city of Lincoln (*HE* ii, 16). In Northumbria, Stephen records two instances of named persons who were in charge (*praeerat*) of a royal town or city (*urbs regis*), with the grave responsibility of holding the unruly bishop Wilfrid in prison, firstly at *Broninis*, the royal stronghold on Holy Island (*VW*, 36), and subsequently at Dunbar (*VW*, 38).

In these civil cases, *praefectus* is sometimes translated as 'reeve'; but this may be rather too lowly a designation for officials in charge of the royal centres of territories which in later centuries became important administrative districts (for *Broninis*, 'Breast Island', see GRJ Jones 1990; for Dunbar, Barrow 1973, 66-7). In fact, in Wilfrid's account we may see the seeds of the thanage, a major social and administrative institution in eastern Scotland in the middle ages (for a development of this theme, Driscoll 1991). Rather than 'reeve', we might prefer the term City Prefect for the official in charge of a royal *urbs*.

A further royal official, this time among the Celtic peoples of western and northern Britain, as well as of Ireland, may be inferred by interpolation between the 5th/6th century and the 12th: namely, the *toisech* or *tywysog*. The term has a long currency in Ireland, indeed up to the present day. In western Britain it is recorded on a memorial stone of the late 5th/early 6th century from Clochaenog (Denbighs). This reads, in Roman capitals, SIMILINI TOVISACI (repeated in Irish oghams) (Nash-Williams 1950, no 176). This may be translated '(The memorial) of prince (or chieftain) Similinus'. The title is Common Celtic, and it is known among the northern Britons in the *Gododdin* poem in the form *tywys*, 'leader' (Jarman 1988, 46, 1 690; 198).

In northern Britain, it next appears in some Gaelic notes added in the mid-11th century to a 9th-century pocket-gospel book, known as the Book of Deer, after a monastery in Aberdeenshire (Hughes 1980). The notes seem to have been inserted in order to record, in a permanent (and indeed consecrated) format, certain royal grants to the monastery. Our concern here is simply with incidental references to the status or office of *toisech*.

There seem indeed to be two distinct, but possibly overlapping, roles.

The first of these was as the hereditary head of a noble kindred, a typically Gaelic/Irish concept. The second was no less hereditary, but it carried with it official duties, administering justice and the collection of tribute on behalf of an overlord who was normally the king. Military organization was another function of the *toisech*. It has been suggested that such functions reflected Pictish, rather than Irish, social organization (Jackson 1972, espec 110-14). Equally, we might recall the office of *praefectus* in a Northumbrian *urbs regis*.

### 5.2.3 The Royal body-guard

All these important men acted at varied degrees of closeness to the king on various occasions. Bede also gives us a precious glimpse of the most immediate companions of the king on the battle-field. In his account of the death of Ecgrith, he relates that the king was struck down by a hostile sword, *caesis circum tutoribus*, 'his bodyguard having been slain around him' (VCB, 27). The Latin word *tutores* is derived from the Classical Latin verb *tueor*, with its principal meaning 'to defend, guard, protect'. We cannot, of course, know whether this incident occurred exactly as Bede reports.

It is tempting to identify within it an underlying Heroic-Age theme, harking back to the *Germania* of Tacitus. The Tacitean equivalent of Bede's *tutores* would appear to be *comitatus*, with its basic concept of close companionship between leader and bodyguard or warband. But it has been noted that 'Old English does not appear to have a collective noun regularly used in Tacitus's sense of *comitatus*' (Woolf 1976, 69 with n 1). In one of the extremely rare instances of the word in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (HE iv, 20), the reference is to the 'heavenly company of the Lamb', *altithroni comitatu Agni*, that is the Heavenly Host.

Among the Britons of the West and the North, the corresponding term is *teulu/teilu*. This may be applied in poetry both to the Gododdin hosting and to their enemy, *teulu Dewr*, 'warband of the Deirans' (Jarman 1988, 40-1, 1 604; 64-5, 1 950). Jenkins, in his account of Early Welsh law, renders *teilu* as 'bodyguard, household troops', and comments that 'marauding expeditions into other countries were an important function of the *teilu*' (Jenkins 1986, 355-6). It is the view of the present survey, however, that the royal bodyguard was essentially the core of a much larger hosting; and the account of Ecgrith's death bears this out.

There appears to be no explicit evidence for royal bodyguards among the Picts and the Dál Riata. It is impossible, however, to believe that they did not exist; and it is possible that in Columba's Pictish convert, Artbranan, *primarius cohortis*, we may see an example. Moreover, among the Picts we may wonder at the precise status of three noblemen, described as tribute-enforcers in the Ulster annal for 729.

This inter-Pictish incident is one in a long campaign of Oengus son of Fergus to acquire supremacy among the southern Picts. It would seem that Nechtan was attempting to gather tribute which Oengus also claimed, and was thereby attempting to assert his rights over disputed territory. It would have been quite appropriate for members of the bodyguard, *tutores* or *teilu* to be involved in such an enterprise.

### 5.2.4 Royal officials and advisers

From the various ranks listed above, kings sought not only military and civilian service, but also advice. The most copious evidence comes from Northumbria, but this is not necessarily because the governance of that kingdom was outstandingly more sophisticated than that of the Celtic kingdoms: Northumbria can show nothing as elaborate as the civil and military arrangements of the *Senchus Fer nAlban* of Dál Riata. The essential difference is that from Northumbria we have the evidence of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and his other narrative writings, as well as Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*; and to lead our search through the major text, we have the guidance of PF Jones's *Concordance to the Historia Ecclesiastica* (1929).

At first sight, we have to consider three distinct, but overlapping terms: *concilium*, a council or formal assembly; *consiliarius*, an adviser or counsellor; and *consilium*, a consultation, or given advice or counsel. From Jones's *Concordance*, it appears that the term *concilium* is only applied to religious assemblies, never to secular ones. This is explicit in the case of a *concilium episcoporum* in the presence of Pope Agatho (*HE* v, 19). It is also used of the assembly more familiarly known as the Synod of Whitby (*HE* iii, 25). It may also double for a *colloquium* of bishops (*HE* ii, 2), as well as for *synodus*, *conventus* or *coetus*.

*Consiliarius*, 'counsellor, adviser', appears very rarely in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It is used for an adviser to the Pope himself (*HE* v, 19), and three times in the chapter which recounts the discussions in Edwin's court about the acceptance of the preaching of Paulinus (*HE* ii, 13). Once it stands alone, but twice it forms one element in a longer phrase about Edwin's advisers: *amicis principibus et consiliariis suis*, 'leading friends and counsellors', and *maiores natu et regis consilarii*, 'elders and king's counsellors'.

More common is the term *consilium*, which is often qualified by reference to the persons from whom advice is sought. Bede's 'elders' may be matched by Stephen's *consilio senum* (*VW*, 20), 'by the advice of the old men/elders'. Another favoured description is *sapientes*, 'wise men'. This occurs in relation to the law code of Æthelbert of Kent *cum consilio sapientum*. When Wilfrid was elected to the see of York by Oswiu and Aldfrith, this was on 'consultation with the wise men of the realm', *cum sapientibus suae gentis* (*VW*, 11). Edwin likewise had taken counsel with *sapientibus* during the discussions which led to the conversion of Northumbria (*HE* ii, 13). One of the nobles who took part in that debate is called *alius optimatum regis*, a very Classical phrase indicating 'one of the king's best men, nobles'. At the very simplest, a king may consult simply *cum suis*, with his own followers.

Some form of 'council' has also been reported among the Picts. Adomnán, writing, it must be stressed, more than a century after the event, relates an incident during Columba's visit to the court of Bridei son of Maelchon (probably at Inverness). As a result of one of Columba's displays of divine power the king *cum senatu* was much alarmed (*VC* ii, 35). It is customary to translate *senatus* here as 'council'; but Sharpe comments 'it probably means the nobles...who adhere to and support the king...In no case is it likely to mean a more formal royal council as a government institution' (Sharpe 1995, n 301).



It will have become apparent in the previous pages that the writers of Latin had a rich vocabulary for the social mechanisms by which a king might seek advice and approval for his policies and actions. It is no less clear that their use of that vocabulary was frequently so flexible that they might baffle attempts by social or political scientists to categorize the elements of those mechanisms and structures. Somewhat similar negative inferences may be drawn from Campbell's seminal paper on Bede's *reges et principes* (Campbell 1979b)

Nonetheless, one thing becomes unexpectedly clear: in a secular context, there is no trace of a permanent formal council or assembly. On the contrary, while the king may have sought advice by summoning together his leading nobles on some major occasions, in other cases he would rely on those who happened to be at court. This makes it difficult to see, in the Northumbrian court, any trace of the Anglo-Saxon witan or folk-moot (*contra* Farmer *et al* 1990, note on p 366).

Moreover, it appears that there was no compulsion to accept advice, nor were there sanctions to enforce it. This becomes abundantly clear in the case of Ecgfrith's fatal campaign against the Picts in 685. Bede stresses that this was undertaken against the strong opposition of the king's friends, *multum prohibentibus amicis*, and especially of Cuthbert, who had recently been ordained bishop. This was just an informal group of courtiers (for want of a better term) such as we have seen on other occasions giving counsel to kings.

If it is correct that in northern Britain in our period there were no formal or legal institutions or mechanisms for peacefully setting limits on the activities of kings, then it follows that the mechanisms must have been violent ones. This was certainly so in the case of kings who were ineffectual in military terms, or weak in other ways. Whether at the court, or in the next valley or kingdom, there were always rivals ready to displace a feeble incumbent, if only by having him tonsured and forcibly retired to a monastery. This chapter has given examples of this, which it is unnecessary to recall.

This does not, however, deal with instances of kings who were not necessarily weak—perhaps far from it—but who were considered to be thoroughly bad, even within the very flexible moral codes of a barely Christianized society. Osred, who came to the Northumbrian throne at the age of eight, was at first regarded very favourably by Bede; but as we have already noted, when he reached the age of manhood (within the concepts of the time) he turned to defiling nuns and having his nobles murdered. By the age of 19, he was assassinated, probably by his own followers or warband. The evidence in this case seems reasonably convincing (Kirby 1974). Similar motives may have lain behind other assassinations at the hands of close followers.

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## RELIGION: FROM PAGANISM TO CHRISTIANITY

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### 6.1 APPROACHES

**T**he background to any account of the introduction and spread of Christianity in northern Britain obviously lies in the paganism of the Celtic Britons, Irish and Picts, and the Germanic Angles. The pagan peoples of Britain and Ireland were for the most part illiterate or, more correctly, preliterate. Among both Celts and Germans, we have some knowledge of religious images and idols, and stories about gods and heroes; but of beliefs, rituals or ceremonies we know little. Indeed, such knowledge as we have of their rites and beliefs comes largely from accounts written down in a Christian context. To a greater or lesser extent, we may expect the information to have been modified, through ignorance or hostility, in the process of transmission.

By contrast, Christianity was pre-eminently a religion of the book: initially the Old and New Testaments. In our period, the leading clergy were certainly literate, and in significant cases were themselves prolific writers. From the later 6th century onwards, and from both Anglo-Saxon England and Irish/Scottish Iona, we have written accounts of the lives of saints and abbots, as well as Bede's monumental *Ecclesiastical History* (*HE*), a work which also touched on the Celtic peoples of Britain. In the later 7th century there begins a series of more or less formal records of church councils and synods. In the 8th century, we also have historical and homiletic writings, in both prose and poetry, for instance from Alcuin of York and Aldhelm (bishop of Sherbourne 705-9).

Among English historians of early Christianity (but perhaps less so among Irish scholars), critical appreciation has tended to concentrate on organizational and institutional history: that is, on the founding of monasteries; the development of bishoprics; the deliberations of church councils and synods; and conflicts over the correct date for the celebration of Easter, and the correct form of tonsure for clerics. These institutional studies have charted the advances and achievements which Christianity had made by the mid-8th century. From these, it might appear that the religion had become firmly established in both Germanic and Celtic kingdoms (general account in J Campbell 1982).

Perhaps because these syntheses have largely been written in the context of an established Christian society, little attempt has been made to examine the actual processes of preaching and conversion, and the impact on the thoughts, feelings and general outlook of the pagans who were the targets of evangelization: such feelings were not necessarily sympathetic.

This and the following chapter aim to examine how, after the nominal conversion of a kingdom—which might have involved no more than the king and court—the beliefs and practices of Christianity were conveyed to the mass of the people. In other words, one

of its aims is to probe beyond the mentalities of bishops, abbots and the more learned of the priesthood and to examine how much of Christian teaching could have been passed to the newly converted, and how much might have been fully understood by them.

These chapters are written (regardless of the author's own views) in the context of a post- or sub-Christian society. In consequence they do not take it for granted that conversion to Christianity was, to use a grossly simplified term, a 'good thing': the confusion and distress which conversion might bring is not ignored.

Finally, until the end of the 20th century, a general but unstated assumption survived that the theology, beliefs and rituals of Christianity were sufficiently well-known to readers as to need no explanation. For a post-Christian 21st-century readership, however, it seems necessary to provide simple definitions and explanations of various elements of Christian belief and liturgy which practising Christians would take for granted. (For Christian lore and legend, see JCJ Metford 1983; scholarly articles on most aspects of the early church up to c AD 700 will be found in di Berardino's *Encyclopedia*, 1992).

## 6.2 PAGANISM

### 6.2.1 Pagan beliefs

Contemporary written evidence of pagan beliefs and practices is hard to come by. We may, however, reasonably infer that the pre-Christian Angles did have a structured system of beliefs and ideas, enshrined in formal rituals, seasonal festivals, and the erection of shrines and other dedicated places. This inference comes from a curious incident in Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert*, when a crowd of ordinary folk, *vulgaris turba*, complained that the monks had taken away the old ways of worship, *veteres culturas*, obviously meaning their pagan rites (*VCB*, 3).

The acts of Coifi, chief priest (Bede's '*primus pontificum*') at Edwin's court, gives us some indication of altars and shrines of idols, set within enclosures. Moreover, there were prohibitions against a priest bearing arms or riding a stallion. Coifi broke both of these taboos; and having profaned a shrine by hurling a spear into it, encouraged his companions to set fire to the idols and enclosures (*HE* ii, 13).

Bede's comment on the reaction of the common folk, *vulgus*, was that Coifi had gone mad. This seems a curiously muted reaction to the profanation of a sacred place. Wicked, abhorrent in the face of men, and dangerously threatening the wrath of the gods, would seem appropriate reactions from the bystanders—the more so because at that time only the king and his counsellors had agreed that the missionary Paulinus should be permitted to preach the Christian faith, and had renounced idolatry. The regeneration of holy baptism had still to be received by king, court and common folk.

The biography of another missionary gives us further glimpses of paganism: namely, Adomnán's account of Columba's travels among the northern Picts of the Great Glen and the Moray Firth. In Adomnán's account, on Columba's first visit to the fort of King Bridei, the gate was shut against him, but it opened after he had signed it with the Cross (*VC* ii, 35). Thereafter, he engaged in a series of wonder-working contests with the

king's magicians or wizards, *magi*. These culminated in an attempt by the chief *magus* to prevent Columba and his companions sailing away up Loch Ness by calling up mist and an adverse wind. To use one of Adomnán's favourite phrases: why say more? Columba's invocation of the Lord Christ readily turned the wind in his favour (*VC* ii, 34).

From these, and others of Columba's activities among the Picts, we may well accept Sharpe's view (1995, 334, n 287) that 'we know little of Pictish religion or superstition before the conversion'. To go beyond this is to enter realms of conjecture uncontrolled by evidence.

Bede's account of the conversion of the Deiran court, and Adomnán's wonder-tales of Columba's activities, though written a century or so after the events, nonetheless have a vivid immediacy which may lead us to respect some of the circumstantial details. It is difficult to say the same of the heroic Celtic and Germanic stories about gods in super-human form, and heroes with god-like attributes. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the modern reader to discern any theological concepts, though there may be hints of ritual practices, for instance in the arcane significance of cauldrons.

It may even be suggested that some of the contests between mythical beasts, or between such beasts and men, which are common on Pictish stones of Classes II and III may refer to stories which have been lost to us, perhaps because they had been suppressed in the early centuries after the conversion. These conjectures are not pursued here, nor are the myths of gods and heroes, both Celtic and Germanic (amid a mass of literature, an introductory handful must suffice: Davidson 1988; Green 1986; Owen 1981; Ross 1986).

For the Anglo-Saxons settled in England, an important field of evidence is provided by place-names which contain either the name of a pagan god, such as Thunor or Woden; or the elements *hearg* or *weoh*, which are believed to refer to temples, shrines or idols. Since these are largely confined to SE of a line between the Humber and the Severn, they are not relevant to the present survey (Gelling 1978, 160, fig 11). In archaeological terms, the most obvious manifestation of pagan religious practices is to be found in the disposal of the dead. In the north-west European lands from which most of the English settlers had come, cremation was a widespread rite. Both on the Continent and in England, cremation cemeteries were often very large. The ashes were placed in a large pottery urn, and were frequently accompanied by animal bones and teeth, flints, antler combs and toilet-sets and other personal items which may or not have been burned. In the case of toilet-sets, the intention may have been to remove these personal, even intimate objects from the land of the living. The exterior of the urns may have moulded or incised decoration, especially with swastikas, symbol of the god Thunor (for this and details from the following paragraphs see D Wilson 1992).

### 6.2.2 Pagan burial practices

More information about the culture of the living may be obtained from the inhumation cemeteries with 'furnished' graves, that is, graves in which the bodies were accompanied with varied quantities of 'grave-goods'. A very broad distinction may be made between graves in which the majority of the objects deposited are beads, ornaments, and minor personal objects such as combs; and those where weapons predominate. It seems reasonable to believe that the former are the graves of women, and the latter are those

of the male warrior class—or rather classes, because the number and type of weapons can vary greatly between cemetery and another, and one grave and another within the same cemetery. This reasonable-seeming gender analysis may not be wholly correct, however, for, at the recent, highly meticulous, excavation of the cemetery at Norton in Cleveland, at least 6% of skeletons determined anatomically as male had apparently feminine brooches or other ornaments (Sherlock & Welch 1992, 18-20).

It has frequently been assumed that the weapons in an individual grave represented the suite of arms which had been possessed by the warrior in life; and which presumably were to be taken with him, symbolically or in spirit, into the afterlife. A searching analysis by Härke (1989; 1990) has effectively demolished the first assumption, and by implication, the second one as well. To quote: 'there was a discrepancy between weapons used in the burial rite, and weapons used in real life'. For instance, a single throwing-spear, or a shield on its own, cannot comprise a functional weapon-suite. Moreover, there are frequently discrepancies between an individual's physical capacity to fight, as determined from his skeleton, and the array of weapons placed in the grave. That array, it appears, was determined largely by the social status of the family of the deceased.

Furnished burials tail off markedly north of the Tees—that is to say, north of the supposed Deira/Bernicia frontier. This is not a result of conversion to Christianity in north Britain in the third and fourth decades of the 7th century: the most extensively published Bernician cemetery, that at Norton in Cleveland, has few if any grave goods which need be attributed to the 7th century (Sherlock & Welch 1992) (illus 26-28). Moreover, in southern England, a distinctive suite of grave objects appears in that century, especially in women's graves (Hyslop 1963, espec 190-4; Hawkes 1982, 48-9); these appear to be lacking in Northumbria.

The most northerly pagan cemeteries known at present are two respectively north and south of Milfield, the royal estate centre, *villa regia*, which Bede calls *Maelmin* (*HE* ii, 14). The graves were on the whole meanly furnished, though at the north cemetery, a woman's grave yielded a suite of middle-rank bronze finery: two annular brooches, a pin, a belt-buckle and a wheel-shaped girdle-pendant. Another probable grave contained an iron chatelaine-complex, with a key and three toilet implements or miniature tools or weapons; again hardly the possessions of a weaving serf. The graves at Milfield North chiefly yielded iron knives; but among unstratified iron fragments were a sword-blade and spearhead. The sword in particular might denote a warrior of high rank (Scull & Harding 1990). In general terms, these objects indicate a late 6th- and early 7th-century population of mixed social rank, appropriate to the environs of a *villa regia*.

The two Milfield cemeteries have other interesting aspects, particularly in relation to the accidents and chances of discovery. The pagan Angles had chosen to bury some of their dead inside circular ditched-and-banked prehistoric monuments of the type known to us as neolithic or bronze age henges. The silted ditches of these were readily visible on air-photographs, and therefore were targets for a team of prehistorians working in the Milfield basin of the river Till (Harding 1981). The discovery of the Anglian graves was a happy by-product for the early medievalist; but it necessarily poses the question: how many other Anglian cemeteries, or at least graves, remain undiscovered in the Till valley and elsewhere in Northumbria in the absence of air-photograph indications. Indeed, at Milfield North there are even faint aerial-photograph indications of further burials outside the henge bank.

The Milfield Anglian burials set in circular ditched enclosures are only one example of ditched, fenced, embanked or mounded structures, which housed Early Historic burials, both pagan and Christian. Some of the enclosing structures were millennia old; others were apparently built for the purpose. When a rectangular fence or palisade encloses a level area with burials, it is sometimes regarded as a shrine, reminiscent of the *fana idolorum*, shrines of idols, mentioned by Bede in his account of the conversion of Edwin (*HE* ii, 13); but since we have no real knowledge of what Bede meant by *fana idolorum*, the equation is at best dubious.

Square-ditched burial-enclosures, sometimes with chariot burials, go back to the Celts of the Pre-Roman Iron Age in the Rhine and Marne valleys. They are also found in south-east Yorkshire at the same period. In simpler form, they appear sporadically in the Roman period, especially in Wales; and then more widely among the pagan Anglo-Saxons. But their greatest flowering, and that most relevant to the present work, appears to have been among the Picts, centred on the 7th century.

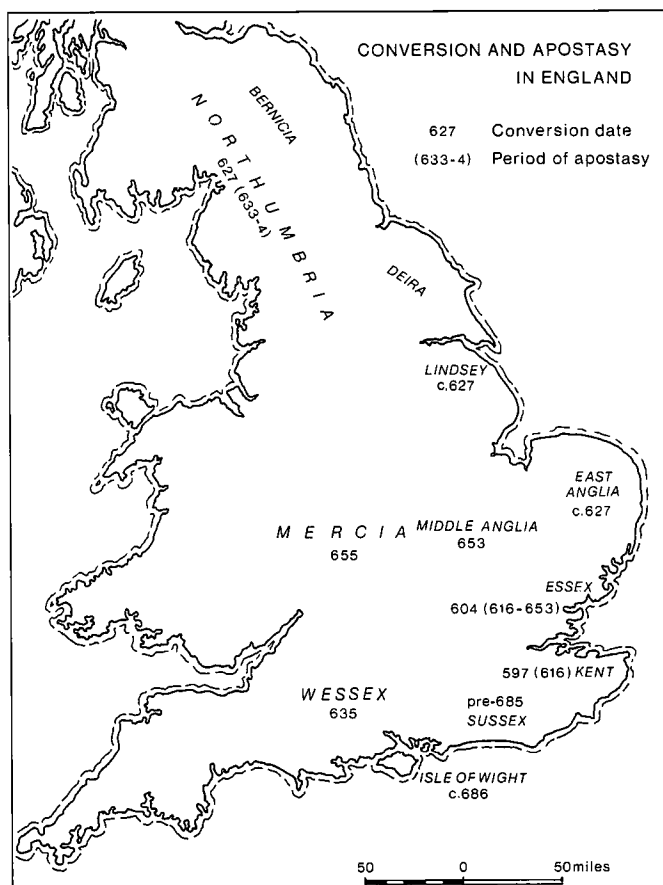
### 6.3 CHRISTIANITY: EARLY MISSIONS AND CONVERSIONS

#### 6.3.1 Fourth- and 5th-century conversions: the legacy of Rome and Ninian

During the 4th century, Roman Britain, as far north as Hadrian's Wall, became Christian in some fashion (illus 15). The actual roots of Christianity are to be found among the garrisons on the Wall. There, Christianity was in competition with other oriental mystery cults, such as that of Mithras, and the ultimate triumph of Christianity was determined in Rome itself. One probable legacy in the 5th century was the founding of a bishop's see at Carlisle, and a church at Whithorn in Galloway. The latter of these is witnessed by a Christian memorial inscription in Latin, and datable around AD 450.

From Whithorn, Ninian reputedly converted the southern Picts. This may possibly mean the Picts north and south of the Firth of Forth in Fife and Lothian. It may also have been originally from Roman military sources that the Gododdin (that is, the descendants of the Votadini), had been evangelized. It appears that by AD 600, their warrior heroes went to church to do penance, and placed offerings of gold on the altar before going to battle (*YG*, stanzas 7 & 35).

15  
Map of  
conversions  
and apostasies.



The most important legacy from the region of Hadrian's Wall, however, was the outcome of chance: the kidnapping of Patrick by Irish slavers in the later 5th century, and his subsequent determination to evangelize that island (although it must always be remembered that he was not the first missionary to Ireland). From this, a century or so later, sprang the mission of Columba to his fellow Irish in Dál Riata in AD 563, and the subsequent founding of the community of Iona. This was to have great repercussions, not only in Dál Riata itself, but also in Pictland and even in Northumbria in the decades after Oswald's accession in AD 635 as we shall see.

#### 4th century: Ninian

Of Ninian's origins and chronology, much has been written, but nothing can be known for certain. It is suggested in this survey that his Roman connections, and his church built of stone (*HE* iii, 4), are elements of Bede's Roman iconography, rather than of historical fact. Less easy to dismiss is Bede's statement that Ninian had already converted the southern Picts to the true faith long before Columba's mission to the northern Picts in the later 6th century (*HE* iii, 4).

While it is uncertain how far south the territory of the southern Picts may have extended, it is tempting to see evidence of their conversion in the appearance of cemeteries with burials oriented E-W, and placed in graves protected by stone slabs: so-called long-cist graves. These are found both sides of the Forth estuary. Radiocarbon age-estimates (Dalland 1993; Proudfoot 1996), and an inscription at the Catstane, Midlothian, cemetery (Cowie 1978), suggest a date-range centred on the 6th century. They follow a long period during which protected graves were almost totally absent. For the early Christians, however, a literal interpretation of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, or of the flesh, would appear to require the protection of the body (for the doctrine, see *Encyclopedia*, 732-3).

#### 6.3.2 The 6th century: Columba

The best known of the Celtic missionaries is Columba of Iona, thanks to the *Life*, written about a century after his death, by Adomnán, the ninth abbot in succession from Columba. This is a tantalizing book to use as evidence, with its sharply focused observation of life both secular and monastic, intermingled with wholly unbelievable visions and works of wonder. (Text, translation and commentary, AO & MO Anderson 1961, revised 1991; translation and commentary, Sharpe 1995).

The small island of Iona itself may seem a remote place to the modern traveller (illus 16), who has reached it by rail, and/or road, and two ferries, and who, if he ventures from the monastery itself across the spine of the island to *Camus Cùil an t-Saimh*, the Bay at the Back of the Ocean, looks out upon the empty wastes of the Atlantic. However, in the days of Columba and Adomnán, Iona was at the centre of the archipelago of Dál Riata and its neighbouring peninsulas; it had access even to the far north-eastern firths of Pictland along the Great Glen; it never lost contact with its roots in Ireland itself; and it might even be host to a Gaulish bishop, travelling home from a visit to the Holy Places of Jerusalem.

Columba (like other distinguished ecclesiastics such as Wilfrid and Benedict), came of a noble family; indeed, he was of the third generation in descent from the famous Irish leader, Niall of Nine Hostages. At an early age he entered upon training for the Church,



16  
View of Iona, the  
site of Columba's  
foundation  
(*Historic Scotland*).

and Adomnán mentions him as a deacon in Ireland (*VC* ii, 1, 53a). Having, it appears, been involved in a conflict between two Irish kingdoms, in which blood was shed, he chose to leave Ireland as an act of penance. Supposedly taking twelve disciples with him, he went to the kingdom of Dál Riata. There he founded a monastery on the unidentified island of *Hinba*, and thereafter established his main monastery on Iona. He never lost contact with Ireland, however, and subsequently founded two monasteries there, at Derry and Durrow. Adomnán's *Life* has several notices of his visits to these foundations in Ireland.

### 6.3.3 The nature and legacy of the Columban mission

Bede reports that Columba converted the Picts to the Christian faith, and also that he had received the island of Iona from them to found a monastery. We may doubt both these statements. As for the first: Columba was indeed reputed to have scored successes against the wizards of the Pictish king, Bridei. Adomnán, however, never states that the king was converted. From many examples, we would have expected that this should have been the necessary first move towards the conversion of the kingdom. On the second statement, we may comment that the dynasty of Dál Riata, after expelling or conquering the inhabitants, had probably been established on the offshore islands, including Iona, for two generations before the arrival of Columba. (But see AAM Duncan 1981).

Adomnán does, however, give us an interesting vignette of the conversion and baptism of a Pictish landowner and his family. Travelling along the west shore of Loch Ness, towards the estate of *Airchartdan* (Urquhart), the saint had a vision of angels waiting for the soul of an aged man named Emchath who, though heathen, had lived a good life. He heard the word of God preached by the saint, and, believing, was baptised (*et credens baptisatus est*). Emchath's son and whole household also believed and were baptised (*VC* iii, 14, 114b–115a; for the archaeological background to Emchath and his household see L & EA Alcock 1992).

Although the narrative here, and in other cases to be mentioned, puts its major emphasis

on Columba himself, it should not be imagined that his was a single-handed mission. In the case just cited, Adomnán expressly refers to ‘the brothers travelling with [Columba]’, *fratres pariter commeantes*. Earlier, at the gate of Bridei’s fortress, Columba approached the door *cum comitibus*, with his companions (VC ii, 35, 82b).

Adomnán relates two other cases of instant conversion and baptism, the one explicitly among the Picts, the other considered to be so because Columba had to use an interpreter. In the first, a whole household, specified as ‘husband, wife, children and servants’ heard the ‘word of life...and believing were baptized’ *verbum vitae...audiens credit, credensque baptizatus est*. This was shortly followed by a miraculous raising of the son of the household from death (VC ii, 32, 78a–79a).

In the second case, Artbranan, a noble warrior, but now old and feeble, was brought by boat to meet Columba on the Isle of Skye. Artbranan is described as a pagan who had retained his natural goodness throughout his life. Having heard the word of God, *verbum dei* from Columba, he immediately believed and was baptized in a nearby stream, which came to be known after him. After the baptismal rites had been performed by Columba, Artbranan died and was buried by the sea shore (VC i, 33, 34b–35a; MO Anderson 1991, xxxii; Dumville 1978; Sharpe 1995, n 148).

These three incidents inspire both comments and questions. In contrast with Bede’s statement that Columba ‘converted that people [ie the Picts] to the faith of Christ’, *gentem illam...ad fidem Christi convertit*, in the ninth year of the reign of Bridei son of Maelchon (HE iii, 4), Adomnán makes no such sweeping claim: indeed, the plain implication is that Columba met only hostility from Bridei and his court. That Adomnán chose to relate three instances, widely scattered among the Picts, as a witness to Columba’s mission, would strongly suggest that conversions were both sporadic and highly individual.

### 6.3.4 The meaning of conversion

Our questions must concern both beliefs—what were *verbum vitae*, *verbum dei*?—and rituals—what was involved in the *baptizationis ministeria*? Formally speaking, the Word of God implies the whole teaching of Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments. This would hardly have been suitable for a dying man like Artbranan; but the Word of Life would have been very appropriate.

Essentially the Word of Life implies the promise of release from the contagion of sin on earth, and the subsequent entry into eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. At its very simplest, it may be summed up as ‘Jesus Saves’. To expand on this, the Christian message is that Jesus Christ was the son of God, who after a life on earth, was crucified to death; he rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven. The believer is promised salvation from sin, and resurrection into heaven. This resurrection has two stages: first, the spirit itself is taken to heaven by angels, a vision frequently seen by Columba (in the case of Emchath) and other holy persons; and secondly the resurrection of the body or of the flesh. Adomnán makes several references to this in relation to the monastic cemetery, where the elect monks of St Columba lie buried, to rise again into eternal life (eg VC ii, 39, 92b; iii, 23, 132a; and see 14.2.4 below on burial in long-cist cemeteries as characteristically Christian at St Andrews). A declaration of faith or belief—present in each of the three cases just quoted—is then immediately followed by the ritual of baptism.

Christian baptism recalls the baptism of Jesus himself in the river Jordan, when divine signs declared that he was the Son of God, and thereby authenticated his future teaching. Symbolically, the implication is the renunciation of sin, and the washing away of its filth, so that the baptized person can enter into a new personal relationship with God. In spiritual terms, therefore, it was a major rite of passage. The action of the ritual requires total or partial immersion in water, and for choice in a stream or spring. We have seen this in the case of the stream named after Artbranan. Adomnán relates a relevant miracle, when an infant was brought for baptism in a place without water. Columba prayed, and blessed a bare rock face from which there then flowed an abundant spring (*VC* ii, 10, 61a). Clearly in this case there had been no question of the infant hearing and believing the Word.

We may pursue briefly the theme of the importance of running water in the baptismal rite, in recollection of Christ's baptism in the river Jordan. Paulinus, evangelist of Northumbria, is recorded by Bede as baptizing his new converts in the rivers Glen and Swale, beside Edwin's estate centres of Yeavering and Catterick (*HE* ii, 14).

Despite their human vividness, these Columban vignettes of preaching, conversion and baptism tell us little about Christian beliefs and doctrines in the Columban church. This would also be true of Bede's major canvas in the *Ecclesiastical History*, as well as his individual accounts of the lives and missions of Cuthbert or of the abbots of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow. It is only from early Christian theological discussions and didactic writings, well beyond the scope of the present survey, that the significance of *verbum vitae*, and of the act of baptism, may be inferred.

### 6.3.5 Christian rites and discipline

Artbranan was a pagan whose life had been one of natural goodness; but Columba frequently had to deal with sinners. In some cases, confession and true repentance was all that was required: one such penitent was comforted with a version of Psalms, 50:19, 'A contrite and a humbled heart God does not despise' (*VC* i, 30, 32a-b). In many instances, however, a period of penance was required. This normally involved a restricted diet, and a period of exile which might extend to seven or even twelve years. It appears that there were communities of penitents on some of the Inner Hebrides, Tiree and the unlocated *Hinba* being especially mentioned (*VC* i, 30, 32b; i, 21, 26b; Sharpe 1995, 282, n 115).

It may be expected that the monks kept, by day and night, the regular ('Canonical') Hours for the daily services (otherwise known as the Divine Office), which included hymns, psalms, bible readings and prayers. In the mid-6th century, St Benedict, abbot of Monte Cassino, drew up a Rule including details of the Divine Office, which came to be observed throughout western Christendom. Adomnán would have taken this for granted, and so the actual Hours are only rarely mentioned by name (Sharpe 1995, 323, n 238).

Indeed, out of the canonical seven day-hours plus one night-hour, only five are certainly recorded: Terce (9 am) and Sext (midday) (*VC* ii, 45); Nones (3 pm) (*VC* ii, 13); Vespers (evening) (*VC* i, 37; iii, 23); and Mattins (midnight or daybreak) (iii, 23). Three of these mentions are of particular interest. The Vespers of *VC* i, 37 was celebrated outside the Pictish stronghold of Bridei, against the opposition of the king's *magi*, 'wizards', but Columba's voice, uplifted like thunder, put fear into king and people. On

the eve of his death, Columba had been writing a psalter, and then 'entered the church for the vesper office of the Lord's night', that is, late Saturday night (*VC* iii, 23, 128b; translation by AO & MO Anderson 1961, 527; MO Anderson 1991, 223). After his death, the matins (or morning) hymns, *ymnis matutinalibus*, were sung (*VC* iii, 23, 133a).

The singing of hymns and the chanting of prayers and psalms in measured manner are frequently mentioned by Adomnán. In particular, they may accompany solemn processions, as when Columba on a visit to the Irish monastery of Clonmacnoise was met by monks singing hymns and praises in his honour (*VC* i, 3, 14a). After his death, the sacred body was carried from the church with the harmonious psalms of the brethren, *canora fratrum psalmodia* (*VC* iii, 23, 133a). Senior monks also wrote psalters, though it is not clear whether this was from memory or from existing copies (*VC* i, 23, 28a; 111 23, 128b. See Sharpe, 284, n 125).

The most solemn, and indeed numinous, of Christian rites is that of the Eucharist or Mass. This is well shown by Adomnán's words in writing about it, in terms such as *sacra eucharisticae misteria*, 'the sacred mysteries of the eucharist' (*VC* iii, 12, 113a) or *sacra misarum sollempnia*, 'the sacred solemnities of the Mass' (*VC* ii, 45, 102a). 'Eucharist' is a Greek word for 'thanksgiving', and its Christian use has a double significance: it is the supreme act of Christian thanksgiving; and it refers to Christ's own actions on the occasion of the last supper with his disciples.

Essentially, the Eucharist re-enacts symbolically Christ's taking bread and wine, giving thanks for them, giving them to the disciples to eat and drink, and declaring that they are his body and blood, given as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew, 26:26-27). In the Eucharist, the priest blesses bread and wine, which are then taken by the congregation. Adomnán refers to both elements. In a miracle which repeats Christ's first and most famous (John, 2:7-11), Columba turned a pitcher of well-water into one of wine (*VC* ii, 1, 53a-b). On another occasion, there is a dual reference to preparing 'the body of Christ', *Christi corpus* and to breaking 'the Lord's bread', *dominicum panem*. It also appears that while two priests may join in breaking the bread, if a bishop is present he alone should act (*VC* i, 44, 45b).

This mention of a visiting bishop is a reminder that there was apparently no resident bishop at Iona during Columba's days. Rather scanty evidence suggests that in the following century, Iona 'may have been the base from which [a bishop] exercised pastoral oversight of Columban churches' (MO Anderson 1991, xlv-xlv). This may reflect a difference in organization between the churches of Ireland and those of England, where a tightly-knit diocesan system was in place by the 8th century.

It appears that, at least at the Columban monastery on the unidentified *Hinba*, part of the service was held outside the church itself: namely, the reading of the Gospel (that is, the portion of the New Testament appointed to be read each day). It was only after this reading that Columba, together with four founders of monasteries, entered the church to celebrate the Eucharist (*VC* iii, 17, 118a). The implication may be that the church on *Hinba* was very small. If this were so, it would be comparable with many churches in Ireland, and probably in Dál Riata as well, where there was no room for the laity (Edwards 1990, 114-21). It is not necessarily evidence for the size of the Columban church on Iona, which remains unknown (*contra* Sharpe 1995, 369, n 387).

In addition to the daily cycle of religious services, Columba's monks were heavily

engaged in manual tasks, including providing food, and constructing and maintaining the buildings of the monastery. Not surprisingly, Adomnán's *Life* provides no systematic account of such activities, but Columba's multifarious miracles often relate to them. So we read of the brothers returning in the evening after working on the harvest (*VC* i, 37, 38a); or catching fish (this time in Co Donegal: *VC* iii, 23, 132a-b). They are harassed by an overseer when constructing a large building (*VC* i, 29, 31a). Adomnán himself participated in an expedition to an island away from Iona, in order to fell and dress pine and oak timbers, some intended for a longship, and others for a great house, possibly the principal communal building of the monastery (*VC* ii, 45, 100a; for a wider account see MO Anderson 1991, xlv-lviii; Sharpe 1995, 72-3).

Finally, it is appropriate to indicate briefly the influence which Iona had in Northumbria in the middle generation of the 7th century, from AD 634 to 664. This came about because the sons of Æthelfrith, disinherited during the reign of Edwin, spent their exile on Iona, and were converted there. After Edwin's death, Oswald gained control of Northumbria, endowed a monastery at Lindisfarne, and introduced monks from Iona. The repercussions of this are more fittingly described in the next section.

## 6.4 CONVERSION FROM ROME

The course of the 7th-century evangelization of England is well-known, especially as a result of Bede's writings in the early 8th. The most important of these was, of course, his *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Ecclesiastical History of the English people, significant rather for its quotations from strictly contemporary documents than for its hearsay anecdotes. Valuable supplementary details are given in several saint's lives, including Bede's *Lives* of Cuthbert and of the abbots of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, and those of Wilfrid (*W*) and Guthlac (*VG*). Inevitably, this wealth of contemporary or near-contemporary writing has stimulated so long a tradition of commentary and synthesis that the modern student may feel overwhelmed. The present account concentrates principally on Northumbria.

### 6.4.1 The Augustine mission

The Christian mission to the Anglo-Saxons was initiated by Pope Gregory. In AD 595-6 he sent the Italian monk Augustine, with nearly 40 companions, to preach God's word to the English people. After some vacillation, in 597 Augustine landed in Kent, which was then ruled by Æthelberht. He himself was a pagan, but his then wife was a Christian Frankish princess, so that he already had some familiarity with Christian doctrine and rituals. Although it was some years before Æthelbert himself was baptized, he freely allowed the missionaries to preach and baptize, and to repair former Roman churches and build new ones. Subsequently he was himself baptized, and donated to the mission landed possessions in the principal Kentish city of Canterbury (*HE* i, 23-26). Such was the initial success of the mission that Pope Gregory himself claimed that, at Christmas 597 'more than 10,000 English are reported to have been baptized' (cited by J Campbell 1982, 45). From this focus, Christianity spread slowly and patchily, to Northumbria in AD 627, to Mercia in AD 655 and to Sussex as late as the 680s. There is an obvious contrast here with Columba's failure to convert the Pictish king Bridei. Columba's focus of conversion was, perforce, the noble household: for the Roman mission to England, the focus of conversion was the ruler and chief counsellors of the individual kingdoms. Consequently, the easiest way to demonstrate the progress of the Christianisation of the

English is with a map setting the dates of conversion against the individual kingdoms (illus 15). Temporary lapses to paganism are also noted.

#### 6.4.2 Conversion in Northumbria

Turning now to the conversion of Northumbria: this was initiated by Paulinus, a member of Augustine's original mission. He came to Edwin's court as chaplain to his Kentish queen Æthelburh in AD 625, having already been consecrated as bishop. Edwin's conversion was not immediate, but on Easter Day 627, with the consent of his counselors, including the heathen chief priest Coifi, the king was baptized at York in a hastily-built wooden church. In this, according to Bede, he was joined by 'all the nobles of his race and very many of the common folk' (*HE* ii, 13-4).

As a concrete example of the scale of conversion, Bede describes an occasion when Paulinus accompanied Edwin's court to the royal estate centre of Yeavinger, *villa regia quae vocatur Adgefryn* (below 15.2). There he stayed for 36 days, occupied from dawn to dusk, catechizing—that is, instructing the people in Christ's saving word—and baptizing them in the sin-cleansing waters of the nearby river Glen (*HE* ii, 14). There is a significant emphasis here on the importance of catechizing as a prelude to baptism. Moreover—though Bede himself does not allude to this—the baptism in a river recalls Christ's own baptism by John the Baptist in the river Jordan.

This original conversion was, however, short-lived. In AD 633, an alliance of the Germanic-Pagan king Penda of Mercia and the British-Christian king Cadwallon of Gwynedd slew Edwin. His immediate successors, who were both apostates, were subsequently slain. This put an end to the mission of Paulinus (*HE* ii, 20; iii, 1). Penda retired shortly after Edwin's death, but Cadwallon's intention appears to have been to exterminate the English invaders and to restore British supremacy. Appropriately, a contemporary Welsh poem eulogizes him as 'leader of the hosts of Britain', while Bede describes him as acting not like a victorious king but as a savage tyrant.

His ravaging, however, only lasted for about a year (the precise chronology is obscure), and in 634 his army was defeated and he himself was slain. The victor, Oswald, of the Bernician dynasty, had lived in exile on Iona, and had been converted there to Christianity. He was inspired before the battle by a dream-vision of Columba himself. Setting up a wooden cross, he had his army pray for victory and overthrew Cadwallon and his forces.

In the territory which he thus obtained was the former British royal centre on the tidal island of Lindisfarne, known as Broninis or Breast Island after the conical hill which dominates it (14.1.1 below; col illus I.3). Here Oswald founded a monastery which was to become one of the most famous in the Insular world; and here he requested from Iona a bishop through whose ministry his Northumbrian subjects might receive the Christian faith and sacraments. The happy choice was Bishop Aidan (*HE* iii, 3). He preached and ministered to the Northumbrians for some 16 years, dealing in an admirably Christian spirit with king and nobles as well as with the weak and poor. The penultimate words of Bede's account of his life comprise a most moving eulogy (*HE* iii, 17; Mayr-Harting 1991, 94-9).

But the second half of the final paragraph strikes a hostile note, marking Bede's detestation of Aidan's practice in relation to the correct date for celebrating the greatest feast

of the Christian Year. The Easter or Paschal controversy arose because—as is still the case today—the correct calendar date for the observation of the Crucifixion on Good Friday, and of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday was related to phases of the moon. Disputes about the appropriate lunar phase began among Mediterranean churches as early as the 2nd century (Loi in Di Berardino 1992, 258); and in the 7th century there was still disagreement in the insular context between the Celtic churches of Northern Ireland, Dál Riata (including Iona), Pictland and the western Britons, and the English churches of the Roman mission.

Bede was especially concerned about the issue: indeed, out of the total number of pages in recent translations of the *Ecclesiastical History*, some 13–15% contain a mention or more extended account of the controversy. This may seem to us today to inflate a technical issue to a gross extent. We may attribute Bede's attitude to his own interest in chronology, for in condemning Aidan he refers explicitly to his own work *De Temporibus*. But it is also tempting to recall Bede's venomous hostility to the Britons, whom he condemned as heretics or infidels (eg *HE* ii, 2), in part because of their refusal to accept the Roman date introduced by Augustine. To a post-Christian reader, it might seem that the whole controversy deserves to be treated with the irony of an Edward Gibbon; but it is the tradition of English historiography to write of it in Bedean terms.

Although the southern Irish had accepted the Roman calculation in the 630s, a similar decision was not made in Northumbria until AD 664, as the result of the synod held at the monastery of Whitby under the presidency of King Oswiu. Sometime before AD 716, Nechtan, king of the (?southern) Picts wrote to Ceolfrith, abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, asking for guidance, and received a lengthy—and highly technical—reply, which led not only to the acceptance of the Roman calculation, but also to the expulsion of an 'Ionan' faction from Pictland. Iona itself, however, and presumably Dál Riata as a whole, had already conformed; but it was not until AD 768 that Wales did likewise.

In addition to the Easter controversy and a lesser one about the correct form of the tonsure, the Northumbrian church was also troubled in the second half of the 7th century by conflicts between the ambitious and domineering Bishop Wilfrid and both church and state in the persons of King Egfrith and his second queen. These are treated at length, and with colourful partisanship, by Wilfrid's biographer Stephanus (Stephen).

The written evidence for such dissensions should not be allowed to detract from the steady advances made by the Roman mission in nuclear Northumbria and subsequently into southern Scotland in the later 7th and throughout the 8th century. This was especially true in terms of organization. Regular dioceses were created, with bishops' seats at Hexham, Lindisfarne, Whithorn and York (as well as a short-lived one at Abercorn); and the arrangements for the appointment of bishops were regularized. In AD 738 the archdiocese of York was created, thus completing Pope Gregory's original plan for two archbishoprics—that is, one each in both southern and northern England. Synods and church councils, sometimes comprised entirely of ecclesiastics, sometimes also including the king and lay counsellors, met to regulate doctrinal matters, or the relations of church and state (Cubitt 1995).

This was also a time of flourishing ecclesiastical writing in Northumbria. This included historical—or perhaps more correctly hagiographic—works, from the large scale of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and Alcuin's verse *Song on the archbishops and saints of the*

*church of York* to the biographies of individual saints (Wilfrid; Cuthbert) or groups (abbots of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow) (Gransden 1974, chaps 2 and 5). No less important was the production of copies of the New Testament, of the whole Bible, of commentaries on the sacred writings, and above all, of the psalms, which were required to be read in daily worship. Many of these books were embellished externally with decorative metalwork and jewels, and internally with paintings ranging from decorative borders to portraits and scenes: so-called illuminated manuscripts (below 20.3).

### 6.5.5 Missionary activity in north-west Europe

Finally, a brief mention should be made of insular missionary activity among Frisian and Frankish pagans. The English contribution to this had in part been inspired by Wilfrid's Continental wanderings, which had included Frisia. Leading figures were Willibrord from Northumbria (died 739) and Boniface, a Wessex man (died 754). As monks, they founded monasteries, which were intended as permanent centres of evangelization; and which, in the Roman manner, were subject to the control of bishops (Stenton 1947, 164-76). Behind these English initiatives, however, lay a century of Irish missionary activity on the Continent; and it should not be forgotten that Willibrord himself had spent 12 years in Ireland. The leading figure was Columbanus, who sought a more active and even hazardous pilgrimage than that of Columba on Iona. He and his disciples founded monasteries across Germany, northern France, Switzerland, and down into Italy, the most important being at Luxeuil, St Gall and Bobbio (Hughes 1966, 57-64; 91-5).

At the end of the 8th and into the 9th century, Britain and Ireland came under ravaging attacks and even colonization from Vikings—or Gentiles as they were frequently called—from Scandinavia. Because these were sea-borne, coastal monasteries, promising treasures of gold and silver, were among the first places to be looted, beginning with Lindisfarne in AD 793. There followed raids on some of the western isles of Scotland in 794; Jarrow in 795; Iona in 795, 802 and 806. In 807, the Columban community moved to a new monastery at an inland site at Kells in Ireland, and thereafter Iona itself was largely abandoned. An attack on Lindisfarne in AD 875 led to its abandonment, the monks undertaking an eight-year long peregrination with the precious relics of St Cuthbert which terminated at Chester-le-Street, some five miles north of Durham.

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## CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY

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[The monks] have taken the old rites away from men,  
and no one knows how to observe the new ones.

Bede, *Life of Cuthbert*, III

### 7.1 THE LAITY AND THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

The cry of the common folk of Northumbria which heads this chapter—‘no one knows how to observe the new rites’—may seem a dire condemnation of the Roman mission’s failure to preach the Gospel. The circumstances as reported by Bede do, however, require some careful analysis. The comment was made to Cuthbert, who was then at a monastery near the mouth of the Tyne. The date appears to be about AD 650, a bare quarter-century after Edwin’s conversion. It was also roughly a quarter-century before the birth of our informant Bede (c 673), and the foundation of the Monkwearmouth-Jarrow monastery (AD 674), where he may subsequently have heard of the incident.

Of these three chronological fixes, the second and third must cast some doubt on the literal reliability of Bede’s statement. As for the first: if we accept the broad truth of the plaint of the lay folk, 25 years does not seem a long time in which to preach a revolutionary message in an area of difficult communications. Nor should we heed too seriously the claim that the old rites had been taken away; as Hill has pointed out (1976), attempts to outlaw pagan practices were a constant feature of Anglo-Saxon legislation, both secular and religious, yet pagan festivals are still with us today.

#### 7.1.1 Preachers and their methods

In fact, before the creation of parishes (a topic which has only recently come into perspective: Blair & Sharpe 1992), it is difficult to establish both the methods and the success of evangelization throughout northern Britain. This is because of both the paucity and fragmentation of the evidence, and is not a reflection of lack of will and effort on the part of the missionaries themselves.

We have already noticed the contrast between Columba’s unit of conversion, namely the individual noble household, and that of the Roman mission, namely kings and their courts. On dynastic conversions, Stephen provides some interesting information in his accounts of Wilfrid’s dealings with the courts of Frisia (VW, 26) and Sussex (VW, 41). The full historicity of these accounts is not pressed here (see Kirby 1978, 166-70; 1983, 111). What they do provide, however, is a detailed programme which it is difficult to parallel elsewhere. In each case, the king allowed Wilfrid to preach the word of God to the heathen populace; in the case of Sussex, over a period of months. In each case, the noble warrior class was converted, as well as many thousands of the common folk, some

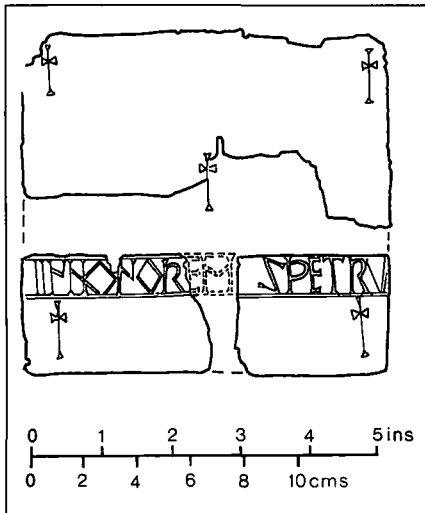
voluntarily, others at the king's command, according to Stephen (*VW*, 41).

Putting together Stephen's two accounts, it appears that Wilfrid preached a doctrine of repentance, which derived from God's works from the beginning of the world down to the day of divine judgement. At that time, sinners were threatened with eternal punishment, but everlasting life after death was promised to the chosen of God in the resurrection. The message therefore was to repent, for the Kingdom of God was at hand. In particular, every one should be baptized 'in the name of God the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. This doctrine of the Trinity was amplified by Wilfrid's teaching. Essentially, this was a succinct statement of the creed or formal beliefs of Western Christendom, as it stood in the 7th century, having evolved through many councils and controversies. It formed the basis for the ceremony of baptism, and was recited at daily prayers.

It should be said, firstly, that none of this would be unfamiliar to members of the main Christian churches today; and secondly, that it summarizes what Paulinus would have preached to Edwin and his court, and what Aidan and Cuthbert would have taught, often to more humble audiences.

Aidan, indeed, was not unfamiliar with the king's table in the royal hall; but he often used this as a seat from which to preach holiness, humility, and moderation to both king and nobles. To such admonitions, Oswald is said to have listened humbly; and a recollection which was handed down to Bede was the very beautiful sight, 'pulcherrimo spectaculo', of Oswald (who had learned the Irish tongue during his exile on Iona), interpreting Aidan's words to the court (*HE* iii, 3). As to Aidan's own material possessions, it is reported that he had only his church, with some very small fields nearby; these were in the vicinity of the principal royal stronghold of Bernicia, Bamburgh. For his missionary work, however, he was able to make full use of the network of royal estates (*HE* iii, 17).

17  
Cuthbert's  
portable wooden  
altar (after Radford  
1956).



Cuthbert's activities are reported in two prose *Lives*, as well as a metrical one (text and translations of prose versions: Colgrave 1940, 1985, cited as *VCA* for the anonymous, *VCB* for Bede's version; valuable commentary by Stancliffe 1989). His career was complicated: administrator, as prior, successively of Melrose and Lindisfarne, and as bishop, briefly and reluctantly of Hexham and then Lindisfarne; in attendance at the Northumbrian court; especially in the early years at Melrose, as a pastoral worker in remote places; and ultimately as a solitary on the island of Inner Farne.

It is his pastoral activity which is of concern here. From Melrose he frequently journeyed, on foot or horseback, to correct sinners, to preach the way of truth, and to convert the people to the love of heavenly joys. He was particularly gifted in inspiring them to confession and repentance. Moreover, in tours which might last up to a month at a time, he penetrated the rugged hills of the Southern Uplands, to reach remote villages which had been visited by teachers only rarely, if at all (*VCA* ii, 5; *VCB*, IX). This comment in itself reveals the limited extent of Christianity in northern Bernicia in the 670s AD.

Of particular relevance to these travels is the presence, among Cuthbert's relics, of a slab of oak, about five inches (130 mm) square. This was incised with a cross at each corner and one in the middle, and also a Latin inscription, probably of the 7th century, translated as 'In Honour of St Peter'. This is reasonably interpreted as a portable altar, used by Cuthbert to celebrate the Mass while on his travels (illus 17).

### 7.1.2 Preaching aids

These accounts of the pastoral work of Aidan and Cuthbert give only a very general impression of the religion which they preached. Further insights into the teaching of the later 7th century and beyond can be gained, at one remove, through contemporary depictions of the chief persons and incidents in the Bible. One of the leaders in using what might be called 'visual aids' was Benedict Biscop, abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow AD 674-89. Over the years 653 to 685, he made five visits to Rome. One of the purposes of the later visits was to acquire for his monastery books on sacred knowledge, holy relics of the saints, and icons. The latter, which were set up around the church, would have been familiar to Bede, who provides us with a summary catalogue, as well as a statement of Benedict's intentions (*VBA*, espec chapters 6 & 8).

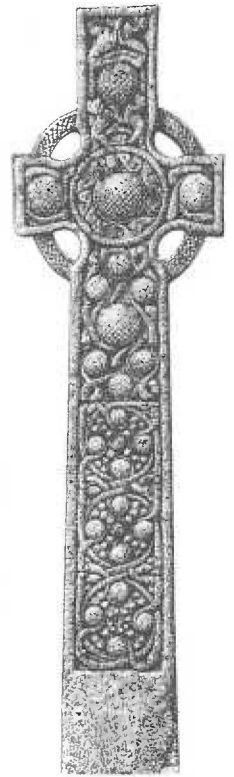
Bede's list implies that there were some Old Testament themes; but predominantly the portraits and scenes were taken from the New Testament, including the Revelation of St John. Thus there were portraits of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Apostles and other saints, as well as scenes of incidents from the Gospels. From Benedict's fifth visit, there is particular mention of scenes from the Old Testament which foretold or foreshadowed events in the New Testament. Bede mentions, for instance, a pair of scenes, one of Moses raising a serpent as a foreshadowing of the elevation of Christ on the cross.

Benedict's purpose was that everyone who entered the church, whether literate or illiterate, would be able 'to contemplate the dear face of Christ and his saints,...to put themselves more firmly in mind of the Lord's Incarnation and, as they saw the decisive moment of the Last Judgement before their eyes, to be brought to examine their conscience with all due severity' (translation, Farmer 1988, 190-1).

These are obviously moving thoughts, powerfully presented; but they could be seen by only a tiny proportion of the people, and those already converted. The concept of teaching through icons could, however, be taken out to the common people through the medium of permanent and public open-air monuments, namely sculptured stone crosses, both free-standing and in the form of slabs or stele carved with crosses in relief. Even today, despite the attacks of both iconoclasts and natural forces, there are in Bernicia at least 40 sites with substantial remains of crosses set up between about AD 700 and 850, and in Pictland there are at least another 40. In Dál Riata, there are between 30 and 40, but many of these are simple cross-inscribed slabs which are probably earlier than AD 700 (fuller accounts in chapters 21 and 22 below).

### 7.1.3 Christian iconography - the role of the cross-slabs

The immediate message of the cross could readily be preached by travelling teachers such as Aidan and Cuthbert: namely, Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross, in order to redeem mankind from sin. And frequently in Pictland and Dál Riata (and also in Ireland), when the cross-head itself is encircled in a stone ring, there is a deeper message. The ring is ultimately derived from the victor's wreath in the Roman games or in war,



18  
The cross: a focus and reinforcement of Christian faith and knowledge. St Martin's cross, east face, Iona (Crown copyright RCAHMS).

and on the ring-headed crosses it symbolizes Christ's victory over death and sin in his resurrection (see Prologue). The full significance of this would need to be taught to the laity, but once it had been taught, the cross would have been a permanent witness.

In addition to the message of the cross itself, these monuments frequently bore scenes of religious significance. Comparisons between the icons favoured in Bernicia, Pictland and the *paruchia*, or major sphere of influence of Iona, reveal surprising differences (see Table 3). Both Iona and the Picts strongly favoured Old Testament themes. The major differences between the two lie in the existence of three Virgin-and-Child icons in the Ionan *paruchia*, and two occurrences of the Desert Fathers, Paul and Anthony, among the Picts.

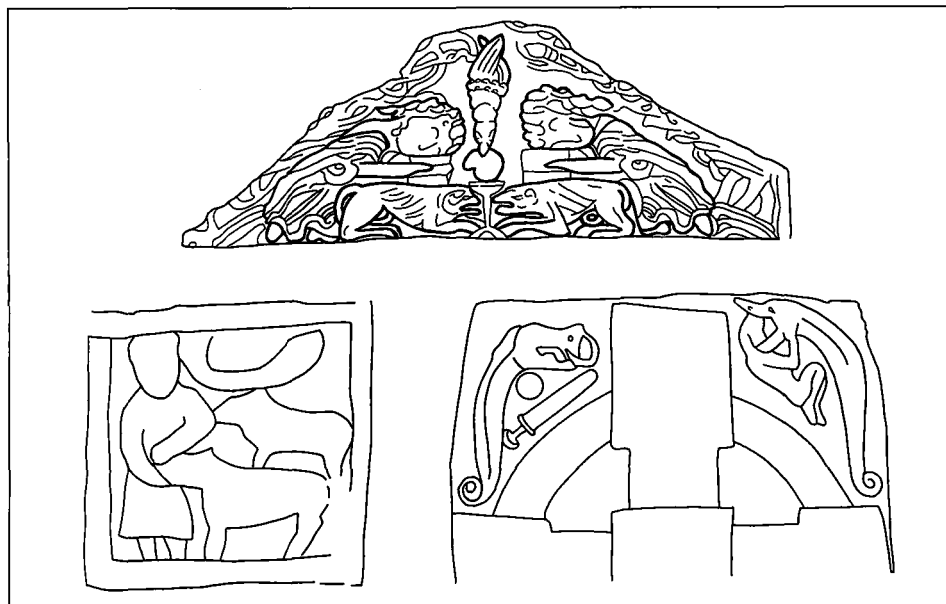
In complete contrast, Bernicia, including the Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire (22.1.3) and Bewcastle, Cumbria, crosses (22.1.2 below), eschewed Old Testament themes, with the doubtful exception of two possible Adam-and-Eve scenes. (The favoured interpretation of these, however, is that the human figures are climbing a cosmic tree). Admittedly, the emphasis on the New Testament is heavily loaded by the very extensive iconographic programme at Ruthwell. It seems likely, however, that if we had the whole of the Rothbury cross, instead of less than a third, it would have revealed as full a programme as that at Ruthwell. As the evidence stands, the only overlap between Bernicia and the more northern sculptures is the scene of the Desert Fathers at Ruthwell.

So much for objective observations. At a more subjective level, the Bernician icons as a whole seem static and formal, especially because so many of the major figures are presented frontally. There is also an absence of tension, of action explicit or implied, between the figures. As aids to teaching, the iconography of each scene (that is, the subject matter) would need to be carefully explained before its spiritual content (or iconology) could be expounded. In the case of Ruthwell, theologically the most pregnant, some guidance would be given to the preacher by the Latin labels around each panel; but the vernacular poem on the narrow sides of the cross, with its Germanic-Heroic theme, would have been difficult to accommodate in a Christian context.

Table 3  
Table of scriptural  
scenes on sculptured  
stones in  
Northern Britain.  
Btle = Bewcastle;  
Rwll = Ruthwell;  
Bern = Bernicia

Description	Iona	Picts	Btle	Rwll	Bern
<i>Adam &amp; Eve or cosmic tree</i>	1				2
<i>Cain or Samson</i>	1	1 or 2			
<i>Abraham &amp; Isaac</i>	2				
<i>Samson and Delilah</i>		1?			
<i>David, lion/bear/lamb, harp</i>	3	5			
<i>Daniel</i>	2	3			
<i>Jonah</i>		4			
<i>Annunciation</i>				1	2?
<i>Virgin and Child</i>	3				
<i>John the Baptist</i>			1	1	
<i>Christ in the desert</i>			1	1	
<i>Sundry Christ scenes</i>				3	2
<i>Other New Testament scenes</i>				1	
<i>Crucifixion</i>				1	4
<i>Ascension</i>				1	1
<i>Saints</i>	1		1		
<i>Desert Fathers</i>		3		1	

Ruthwell appears to present another problem. Both the actual scenes and their theological significance have been the inspiration of much description, discussion and controversy over some two centuries. A recent bibliography, which does not claim to be exhaustive, occupies 32 text pages (Cassidy 1992a, 164-199). The controversies continue. Three questions may be posed: what might an 8th-century preacher, if transported to modern times, make of present-day interpretations; what indeed would he have made of Ruthwell in the light of the already copious biblical commentaries of his own day and how much of those commentaries and interpretations could he have conveyed to new converts being prepared for baptism?



19  
Three icons  
favoured among  
the Picts: top, the  
Desert Fathers  
Paul and Anthony,  
from the Nigg  
stone; below left,  
David with harp,  
lamb and lion,  
Aberlemno  
(Roadside); right,  
Jonah swallowed  
by a sea monster,  
and then  
disgorged, Fowlis  
Wester.

The emphasis on Virgin-and-Child scenes in Dál Riata is unusual, but otherwise the Iona repertory is closely similar to that of the Picts. Among the latter, the scriptural scenes often seem to be both subordinate to the riding and hunting scenes, and also more crudely executed. They are, however, full of incidents which might catch the interest of the laity, and serve as a starting point for religious teaching.

We can look at three examples (illus 19): at Aberlemno, Fife, and elsewhere, we see a brave shepherd lad, who rescues his father's lambs from lion and bear (I Samuel 17, 34-37). But David is the foreteller of Christ himself; the lamb is both the Passover Lamb of the Hebrews, and Christ as the sacrificed Lamb of the Christians; and lambs also symbolize Christ's flock of faithful souls (Alcock 1995b). At Fowlis Wester, a noble warrior has dropped the sword and shield which denote his rank, because he is being swallowed by a terrible sea-monster; but then marvellously, he is safely disgorged (Sutherland 1994, 151). Here, then, is a symbol of Christ's rising from the tomb; but Jonah himself also demonstrates the futility of attempting to flee God's commands (Jonah 1).

In the case of the Desert Fathers at Nigg we see two men so holy that wild beasts lie at their feet, and the birds of the air bring them bread. So these are models of the life of sacrifice and abstinence, duly rewarded by the bird which symbolizes the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The loaf represents the holy wafer of the Eucharist, which is the body of Christ; and the segment missing on the left side of the loaf reminds us of the spear thrust into Christ's side as he suffered on the cross. So here as elsewhere on the Pictish stones, an apparently simple, readily comprehensible scene reveals great spiritual depths.

In discussing the role of sculptured crosses in the preaching of Christianity, their physical context or location must also be considered. In Northumbria, it seems probable that many major crosses, including Auckland St Andrew, Hexham, Rothbury and Ruthwell, were set up actually within a church, while others, such as Bewcastle, were within a

church-enclosure (22.1 below). In these cases, their role would be to reinforce Christian faith and knowledge. This would also be true of the crosses on Iona (illus 18). Among the Picts there is no direct evidence for this, though it may be inferred that at Applecross (Close-Brooks 1986, 122-3; Foster 1996, 82-3), Meigle (A Ritchie 1995) and Portmahomack (Allen & Anderson 1903, 88-95; *DES* 1991, 43; 1994, 40), the crosses were in monastic enclosures. Elsewhere they probably stood openly in the countryside where they could have served as praying and preaching stations for missionaries who were the Pictish equivalents of Cuthbert in Teviotdale.



The previous pages have given a broad, perhaps over-simplified summary of one aspect of the carved crosses of Northern Britain: namely, their importance in the preaching of the Christian message. This section may conclude with an attempt to use the crosses to indicate quantitatively the density of Christianisation in the early centuries. Throughout Dál Riata, the surveys of the Royal Commission (1971-1992) have recorded large numbers of cross-incised or carved stones of lesser significance. These bear witness to the spread of Christianity from Iona in the later 6th century and throughout the 7th and later centuries. Such a record cannot be fully matched in Bernicia or Pictland. It would appear indeed that—except in Dál Riata and around the great monastic centres of Bernicia, such as Hexham, Lindisfarne, Melrose or Monkwearmouth-Jarrow—Christian teaching and worship can have made little impact in northern Britain before the middle of the 8th century, or even later.

## 7.2 THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY

This section may begin by recalling the role played by kings, together with their counsellors, in promoting the conversion of their peoples to Christianity, and in providing material resources to establish and to maintain monasteries and churches. The map of the progress of conversion (illus 15 above) is essentially a statement of royal activities, from Æthelbert in Kent, through Edwin and Oswald in Northumbria, to Peada of the Middle Angles.

### 7.2.1 Relations of rulers and churchmen

In Northumbria, we hear from Bede of the creation of the episcopal see on the royal estate of Lindisfarne. From Bede likewise we learn of the generous donations of land to found successively the monastic house of Monkwearmouth and its daughter house at Jarrow. One of the most fulsome acknowledgments of royal generosity is that in Stephen's account of the building and dedication of Wilfrid's church at Ripon, as related in *The Life of Wilfrid* (*VW*, 17). Great emphasis is placed on the lands which Ecgrith and his brother Ælfwine had donated for the benefit of their souls.

The subsequent unhappy relations between Wilfrid and Ecgrith and his second wife, Iurminburg, demonstrated that there was nothing sacrosanct about a bishop. These relations included Wilfrid's imprisonment in two of Ecgrith's royal strongholds, Lindisfarne and Dunbar (*VW*, 36; 38), and his expulsion from Mercia and Wessex through the malign influence of relatives of the king and queen (*VW*, 40). But it must be admitted that the over-ambitious, disputatious and intransigent bishop had equally incurred the displeasure of Archbishop Theodore and his fellow bishops.

One particular example of Iurminburg's supposed persecution of Wilfrid may, however, bear another interpretation. Stephen relates that she took from Wilfrid his *chrismarium*, which she then wore as an ornament (*VW*, 34). The word has been translated as 'reliquary' (Colgrave 1927; 1985, 70-1), and Stephen certainly describes it as filled with holy relics. It may more correctly be translated as 'chrismatory': that is, a container for the chrism or consecrated oil, used for instance in the sacrament of baptism. It may be that an amulet associated with baptism—for so it might have appeared in a still partly pagan society—would have had a special significance for a childless wife such as Iurminburg.

The main subject of the present section, however, is the intervention, or reputed intervention, of the Church in political and social matters. The earliest instance of this is Columba's ordination, supposedly at the behest of an angel, of Áedán mac Gabráin as ruler of Dál Riata. This was related a century later by Adomnán (*VC* iii; 107a & b). The word used by Adomnán, repeated eight times in one paragraph, is the verb *ordinare*, or nouns derived from it. It is important to stress that this does not mean 'to anoint', still less 'to crown'. It is the verb normally used in the *Ecclesiastical History* for the ordaining of bishops (PF Jones 1929).

There has indeed been much discussion of Adomnán's account: discussion which necessarily turns, not on what actually happened around AD 574, for that is unknowable; but on what Adomnán thought had happened, or at the least, what Adomnán wished his readers to believe (Enright 1985; Sharpe 1995, 61-2; 355-7 with nn 358-9). From these discussions, the most probable conclusion is that Adomnán's record is not, as it purports to be, a historical statement of events on Iona c AD 574, but a statement of his own theory of divine kingship as developed in the late 7th century. However that may be, Áedán son of Gabráin did become king, and did indeed found a dynasty.

Certainly it came to be believed that divine intervention in the form of an angel had inaugurated the coming of Áedán to power. Bede relates an even more striking divine intervention in political matters: namely, the growth of Edwin's power, and the expansion of his rule, so that he came to control territories more extensive than those of any previous English ruler, and moreover inhabited by Britons as well as by English. This was a divine token, *auspicium*, that he would receive both the Christian faith, and subsequently the heavenly kingdom (*HE* ii, 9; commentary by Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 65-6).

### 7.2.2 Iona's influence on secular affairs

A straightforward example of clerical attendance at, and presumably involvement in, a secular matter (that is to say, one without divine or miraculous elements) is hinted at by references to Columba's presence at a 'conference of kings at Druim Cett', *regum in dorsum Cette conductum* (*VC* i, 49; 49b). The kings are named as Aed, Ainmure's son, a leading figure among the Northern Uí Néill in Ireland, and Áedán, Gabráin's son, king of the Dál Riata in both northern Ireland and Scotland.

The event, which was no doubt well known in the traditions of Iona, remains unfortunately opaque to us. Not only has the purpose of the meeting been the subject of much discussion; even its date, and the precise status of Aid at the time, have been disputed. Although the Annals of Ulster enter the conference under the year 575, a date sometime between AD 586 and 597 seems more likely. As for the business of the meeting, it is likely that its purpose was to discuss and decide the future relations between the

Northern Uí Néill and the Dál Riata of both Ireland and Scotland, and their respective kings. Columba may have been present simply as adviser to Áedán as king of the Dál Riata; though subsequent belief attributed a more central role to him (for accessible discussions: Bannerman 1974, 157 ff; Sharpe 1995, 312-4).

The most impressive of Iona's interventions in secular affairs was undoubtedly Adomnán's attempt to limit the suffering of women, children and men in holy orders in the endemic warfare of the time. At a synod held at Birr in central Ireland in AD 697, a law sometimes known as *Lex innocentium*, Law of Innocents, sometimes as *Cain Adamnain*, Adomnán's Law, established 'a perpetual law on behalf of clerics and women and innocent children', with both monetary penalties and periods of penance for acts of violence (Meyer 1905, 24-33 = clauses 34-5). A list of guarantors, with the names of 40 churchmen and 50 kings from Scottish Dál Riata and Pictland as well as the whole of Ireland is considered to be substantially genuine (Ni Dhonnchadha 1982).

Adomnán's skills in diplomacy in bringing so many guarantors together are manifest. (Another, albeit minor example, was his negotiation with Northumbria for the release of Irish hostages taken by Ecgrith: *AU*, 687). Moreover, the humanitarian objective of the Law was admirable, and indeed it may have done something to ameliorate the conditions of war in a Heroic society. But it must also be recognized that *cain* means 'tribute' as well as 'law'; and, consistently with this, clauses 35 to 53 deal chiefly with fines and penances and the methods of collecting them, even to regulations for the feeding of the enforcing stewards. The fines or tribute represented a potential source of income for the Church itself (Hughes 1966, 150-1).

### 7.2.3 Christian attitude to warfare

This brings us to wider issues of Christian attitudes to warfare. A modern reaction to some anecdotes in both Bede and Stephen might be that they were both vindictive and triumphalist. Stephen describes the Picts as like wild animals, *populi bestiales*, and boasts that their corpses filled two rivers (*VW*, 19). Bede praises the heathen Æthelfrith for ravaging the Britons more than any other English king (*HE* i, 34), and approves his slaughter of some 1200 British monks as divine retribution for a slight to St Augustine (*HE* ii, 3).

From the viewpoint of a Roman Christian, however, the Britons were worse than heathens: they were infidels or heretics, because they celebrated Easter on the wrong date, and their killing was therefore justified. Ecgrith's reported massacre of the Picts was acceptable as occurring in a just war because, in Northumbrian eyes, they were rebels—admittedly against subjection to the English.

Over the period of the present survey, the Germanic and Celtic concepts of heroic warfare were being replaced, or at least modified, by those of a just war. The roots of that lay partly in the wars of the Old Testament, partly in Classical ideas, and partly in early Christian writings (Cross 1971). In the 7th century, it could be accepted that the decisively successful warfare of Oswald against the infidel British king, Cadwallon (*HE* iii, 1-2), and Oswiu against the Mercian heathen king Penda (*HE* iii, 24), were just wars because they were defensive. Indeed, the second victory not only freed Northumbria from heathen ravages but led to the conversion of Mercia to the Christian faith. On the other hand, Ecgrith's unprovoked ravaging of Ireland was unjust, and was soon visited by divine retribution, namely the deaths of Ecgrith and much of his army (*HE* iv, 26).

A little over six months before his death in AD 735, Bede wrote a lengthy letter to Bishop Egbert, urging on him various reforms aimed at improving and strengthening the Christian faith in England. One of his particular sources of alarm was the founding of false monasteries by grants from members of the warrior nobility, who then evaded their military duties. Specifically, he feared that 'by reduction in the numbers of the secular army there should not be enough men to defend our boundaries from barbarian invasion' (Farmer 1990, 344-5).

Later in the 8th century, Archbishop Boniface referred to a synod which ordered that money raised from the properties of the church should be used for the benefit of the army, for defence against hostile foreign peoples (Cross 1971, 269-82, espec 273, n 2). It is evident that some decades before the first Viking assaults on coastal monasteries, the Church fully appreciated the need for military defence.

In contrast, however, to the spirit of his letter to Egbert, Bede recognized that Benedict Biscop, first abbot of Monkwearmouth, had been a noble warrior, who had received a grant of land appropriate to his military rank from Ecgrith. This he abandoned, despising earthly warfare in order to fight for the true king in heaven (*VBA*, 1). It is also clear that the two following abbots, Ceolfrith and Eosterwine, had come from the same warrior-noble class (*VBA*, 7 & 8). This is even more evident in the case of Wilfrid, who at the age of fourteen, having equipped himself with arms and horses, left home to seek the heavenly kingdom (*VW*, II). The difference between these four holy warriors and the monks condemned in Bede's Letter to Egbert was, of course, that the latter were not genuine men of God.

#### 7.2.4 Christian attitude to marriage

So far, we have discussed the impact of Christianity on society as such. The particular area where the Church intervened in personal conduct was that of marriage. Here there were obvious conflicts between heathen and Christian practices, but there were conflicts within Christianity as well.

The first of the pagan/Christian conflicts came to a head on the death of Æthelberht of Kent in AD 616. His son Eadbald had not received the faith, and on his father's death he married his stepmother, Æthelbert's second wife (*HE* ii, 5). This appears to have been an accepted Germanic custom (Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 61), presumably to strengthen a dynasty at the critical moment of a king's death. Bede writes of this as a severe setback to the Roman mission; but in fact, Bishop Laurence quickly succeeded in converting Eadbald, who then ruled as a Christian king for over 20 years (*BD*, 110).

Bede later refers to the unlawful marriage, *inlicitum coniugium*, of a kinsman of King Sigeberht of Essex (*HE* iii, 22) in 653. He does not specify the particular illicit aspect, and we can only surmise that it was one acceptable within the Germanic ethical code, but not the Christian one. Since Bishop Cedd had not been able either to prevent or to correct the marriage, he excommunicated the guilty nobleman (commentary by Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 119).

It is likely that conflicts between celibacy, marriage and adultery were quite common. A striking instance is seen in a letter written in 746/7 by Archbishop Boniface and seven other missionary bishops to King Æthelbald of Mercia, 'preferred in the love of Christ to all other kings'. After two paragraphs of fulsome praise, the writers mention 'a report

of an evil kind': namely that the king indulges in 'the sin of lasciviousness and adultery'; and to make matters worse, does so 'with holy nuns and virgins'. To these complaints was added infringements of ecclesiastical privilege (*EHD* no 177, pp 816-22).

One outcome of this letter appears to have been that Æthelbald issued a charter in AD 749, which substantially freed the churches of Mercia from public burdens. There is, however, no evidence of any moral reform; but in view of 'the elastic marital customs of the English...such strictures [were] not uncommon'. However that may be, in 757 Æthelbald was murdered by his own bodyguard, victim of an unusual breach of the contemporary code of noble behaviour (*BD*, 17-8).

At a more common level, major causes of conflict and unhappiness among Christians arose from the wish of one party for a divorce. Adomnán relates the personal dilemma of a wife who had developed an aversion to marital relations because of her husband's ugliness (*VC* ii, 41, 93b-94b). She offered even to retreat to a nunnery overseas. Columba rejected her pleas, taking the rigid stance of Christ's admonition that in marriage 'the two will become one flesh' (Matt, 19:5; Mark, 10:8). After the wife, husband and Columba had fasted together, and the saint had spent the night in prayer, the wife's heart was turned from hate to love, *de odio in amorem*. We might reflect that not all disaffected spouses had such marriage counsellors; but the important moral of the story is Columba's refusal of the wife's offer to enter a nunnery, and his insistence on Christ's teaching.

A quite different approach to conjugal rights is seen in the first marriage of Ecgfrith. The first wife, Æthelthryth, had previously been married briefly to a nobleman, Tondberht. On his early death, she was married for 12 years to Ecgfrith. Over that period she maintained her virginity, despite the king's urging; at the least, this must have been inconvenient for the maintenance of the dynasty. Ecgfrith attempted to recruit the support of Wilfrid in persuading the queen to consummate the marriage, and it was indeed Wilfrid who vouched for her virginity to Bede. Ultimately, Æthelthryth gained Ecgfrith's permission to enter the double monastery at Kirk Hill, St Abb's (*Coludesburh*), Berwickshire; below, *illus* 56). Subsequently, she gained a reputation of great saintliness at Ely, and her virginity was ultimately confirmed by the incorruptibility of her corpse (*HE* iv, 19). Evidently the New Testament teaching that husband and wife became one flesh did not apply here because the marriage had not been consummated.

Finally, we should reflect on the anguish revealed in a 7th-century Latin poem, of possibly Northumbrian or Irish origin. This records, in alternate stanzas, the wish of a husband to divorce his wife and turn to God—presumably by entering a monastery; and the wife's response, 'God has joined us well together'. The tone of the poem is certainly more sympathetic to the woman, who calls the man 'My darling husband', whereas he responds 'You disaster, be gone' (Lapidge 1985, 23).

At the level of advanced modern scholarship, the poem gives rise to considerable discussion about its provenance, its verse structure, the precise meaning of the words of husband and wife, and the appropriate Christian ruling for dealing with such a divorce (Lapidge 1985; Dronke 1986). Behind such modern debate, however, the modern reader can fully appreciate the distress created by the clash between human and divine love. And on the basis of the Columban ruling quoted by Adomnán, it might be thought that the wife's plea was compelling in New Testament terms.

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## THE ECONOMY

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It is not necessary to be a Marxist in order to affirm that economic matters, the opportunities that they offer and the constraints which they impose, play a very large part in both the individual and the social life of human beings. It will appear, however, that within the temporal and geographic limits of this study, our evidence for the economy is scanty, fragmented and inchoate.

As it happens, the best evidence comes not from the basic farming economy which provided the food, and thereby the energy, which fuelled all social activity. Instead, the evidence is to be found in the areas of the non-essential—that is, of luxuries—and of the non-material—that is, religion. This comes about because it is in those areas that we find reasonably plentiful written evidence to illuminate the mute witness of archaeology.

### 8.1 IMPORTS, EXCHANGE AND CURRENCY

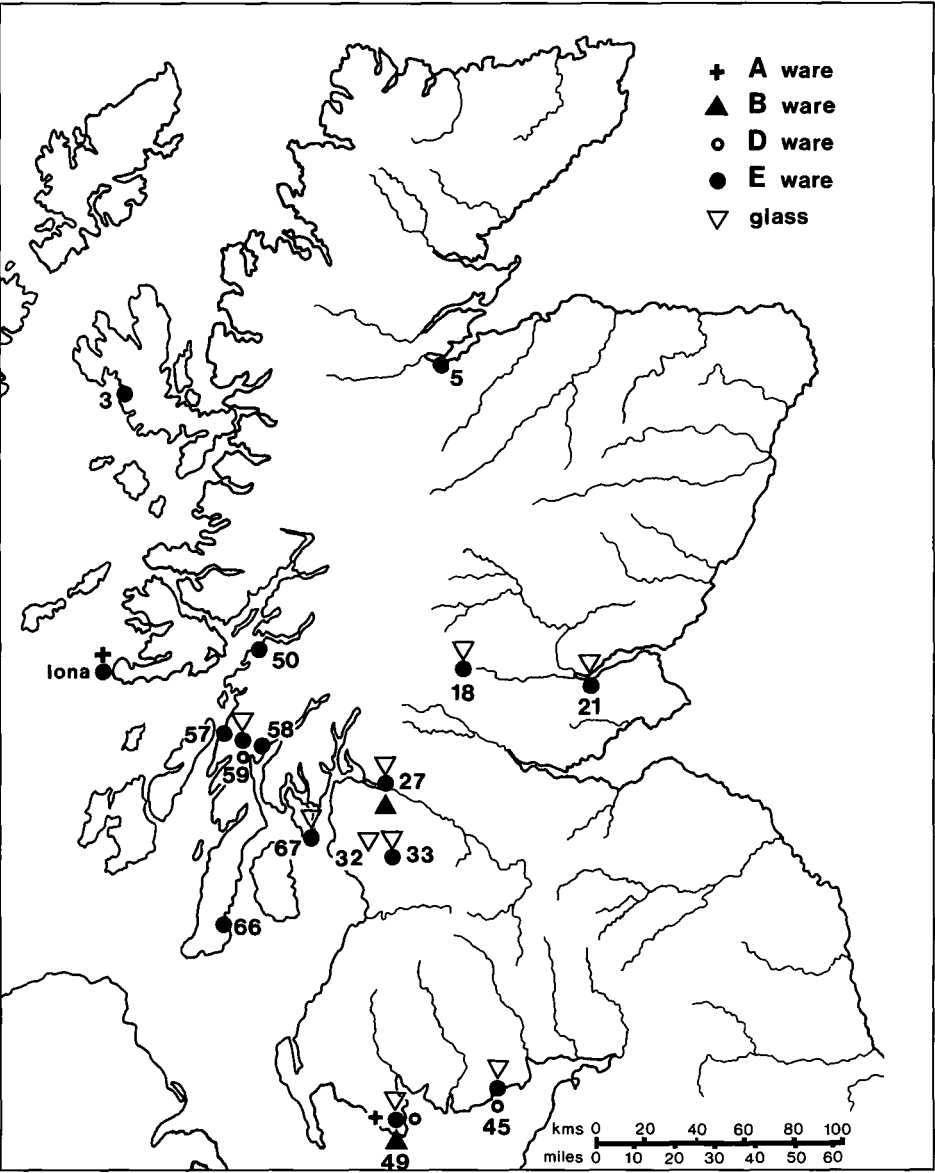
We have already seen something of religiously-inspired contacts between northern Britain on the one hand and the Mediterranean and Gaul on the other (Chapters 6 & 7). As examples, we noted the occurrence of Mediterranean cross-symbols in Dál Riata which had been introduced along the western seaways. On an altogether grander scale Bede informed us of Benedict's travels by sea and land to Gaul and to Rome; his introduction of Gaulish craftsmen—both masons and glaziers—for building Monkwearmouth; and his collecting of vestments, sacred vessels and icons from Rome (*VBA*, chaps 2 - 6).

Altogether more interesting from the economic point of view were the two silk cloaks, 'of incomparable workmanship', which Benedict brought back from his fifth visit to Rome; he then exchanged these for three hides of land beside the river Wear (*VBA*, chap 9). In other words, they were regarded not as a precious gift, but as an object for negotiable exchange.

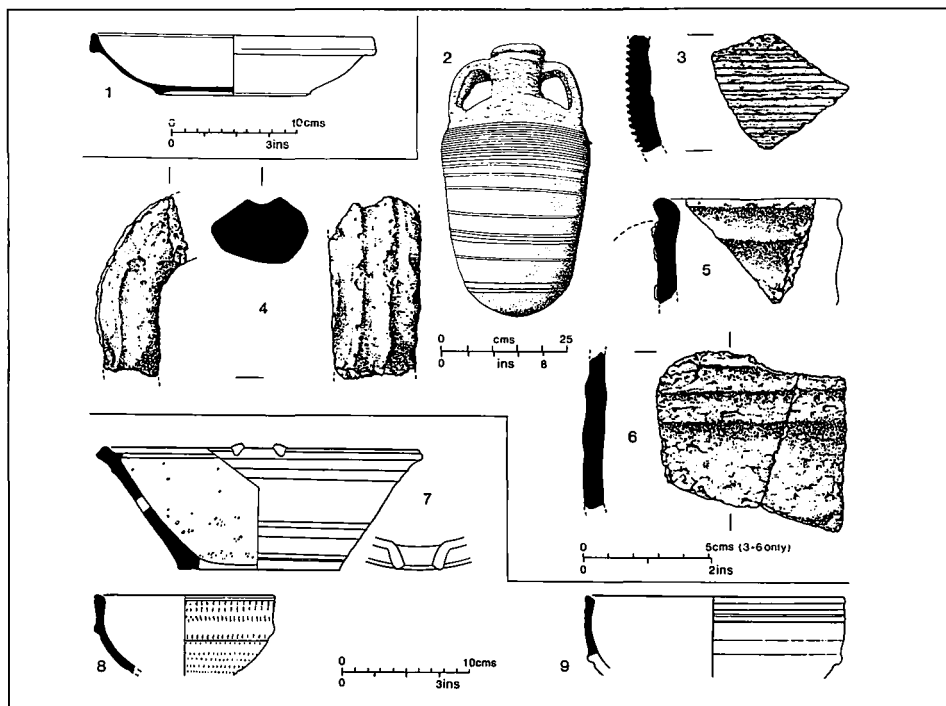
An explicit reference to Gaulish contacts, presumably of a trading nature, was reported by Adomnán in the context of one of Columba's miracles of second sight. This need not invalidate the basic statement that Columba and a companion went to a place described as *caput regionis*, the chief place of a region, where they met the skipper and seamen of a ship from Gaul (*VC* I, 28, 31a). The *caput regionis* is frequently identified with Dunadd (Sharpe 1995, 290-1), but Dunollie is more likely because it controls the excellent harbour of Oban Bay; moreover, it is mentioned five times in the *Annals*, as against only two references to Dunadd.

8.1.1 Imported pottery and cargoes

Turning now to the principal archaeological evidence for trade with the Mediterranean, demonstrated by exotic pottery on Insular excavations (illus 20): this appears to have been first recognized at a ring fort at Garranes, Co Cork, Ireland (Ó Riordáin 1942). The first major statement was made in 1956 on the basis of evidence from Tintagel, supplemented by brief notices of other sites (Radford 1956). Four classes of pottery were distinguished, three of which are now fully accepted as imports of the late 5th and 6th centuries: A, red-slipped tableware; B, amphorae for the transport of wine and olive oil; and D, grey bowls and mortaria (illus 21). Radford demonstrated that the tableware could readily be paralleled in north Africa.



20  
Distribution of  
glass and imported  
pottery in northern  
Britain  
(Angie Townsend  
after E Campbell).



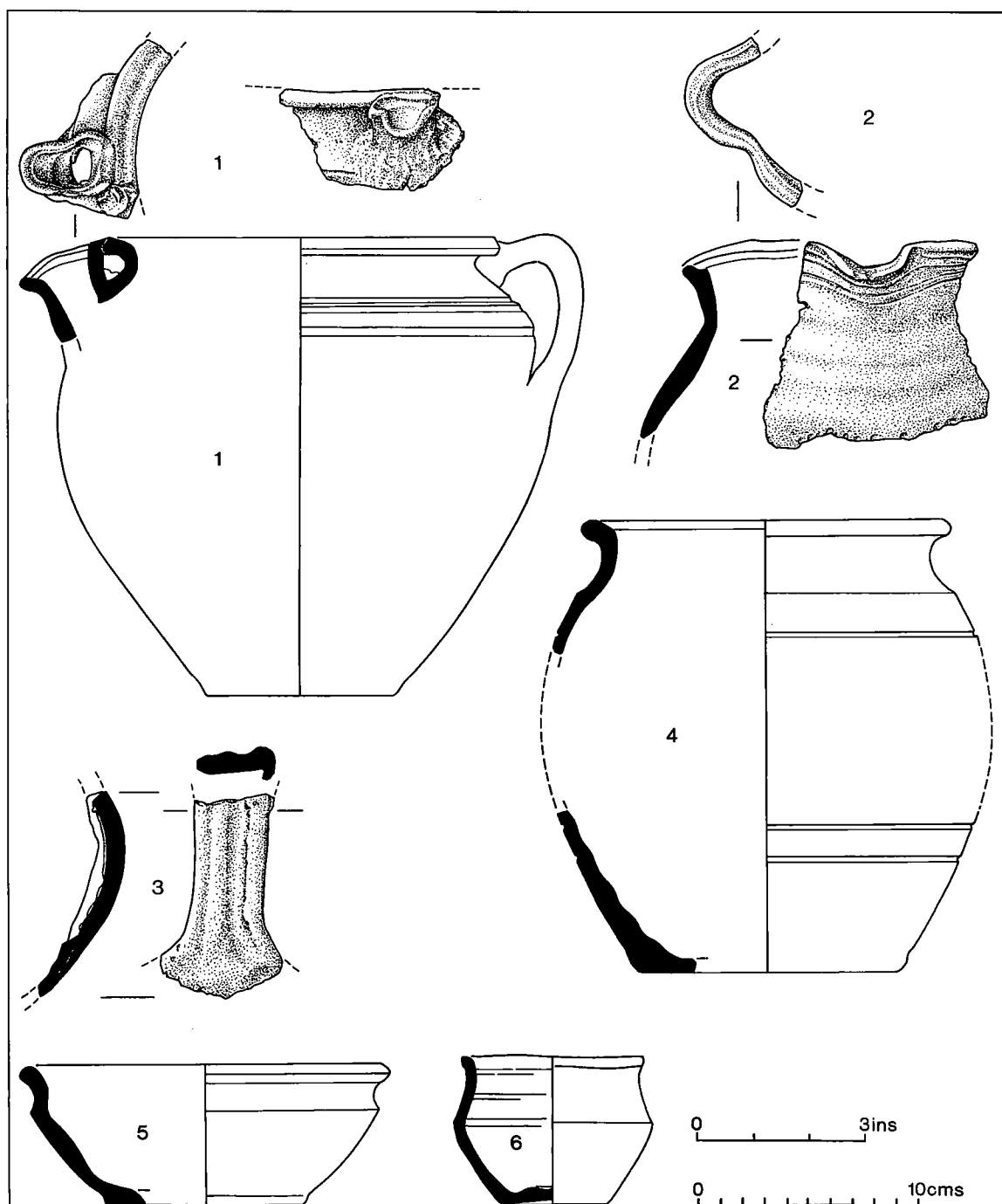
21  
Imported pottery  
at Dinas Powys (1,  
7-9) and *Alt Clut*  
(3-6); amphora  
(2) from Asia  
Minor for compar-  
ison with sherds  
from Classes A  
(1); B (3-6); D  
(7-9)

In 1959, Thomas expanded the range of class D to include other types of bowl. More importantly, he introduced a new class which proved to be very widespread in Britain and Ireland: class E (Thomas 1959; here illus 22). This was a gritty ware which included medium-sized jars, small bowls, and beakers (which sometimes served as unguent pots). Taken in combination, the E-ware vessels comprised a useful set of tableware. They appeared to originate in western Gaul, as did the D-ware bowls. Class D may be dated to the 6th century, and Class E to the late 6th and 7th centuries.

The two seminal papers by Radford and Thomas led to an increasing recognition of these classes of imported pottery in existing museum collections and on new excavations, so that in 1981 Thomas was able to produce a major corpus, modestly described as *A provisional list of imported pottery in post-Roman western Britain and Ireland*. Since then, the study of the pottery itself has largely taken the form of additions and refinements, especially in contributions by Ewan Campbell (eg 1988; 1993; 1997a).

Recent discussions have taken the occurrence of imports of pottery as archaeological facts, and have gone on to consider sources, cargoes, routes and points of entry, and also the Insular products which might have been exchanged for the imports: in other words, the economic and social implications of the pottery. Classes A and B certainly come from the Mediterranean, the bulk of them from the east, and markedly lesser quantities from northwestern Africa. It appears indeed that vessels originating in eastern ports were engaged in tramping voyages, and picked up north African goods on the way through the Mediterranean. The major cargo was, however, wine and oil, and the class A tableware was a minor luxury item (Fulford 1989).

The sources for classes D and the markedly more common E cannot be closely defined,



22

The range of E-ware vessels, from large flagons and jars to small bowls and beakers; vessels from Dunadd (2, 3, 4, 5) and Buiston (1, 6).

though western France, and perhaps specifically the Bordeaux region, may be favoured (Campbell 1988, 125). The class E table-ware can scarcely have matched the luxury prestige value of the class A red slipware, and can hardly have been an export object in its own right. It is likely that, just as class A was subordinate to the import of wine and oil, so classes D and E came on the back of the import of wine in wooden casks, which have left few traces in the archaeological record (Thomas 1990).

It is obvious that all four classes necessarily came to Britain and Ireland by sea. In Britain, therefore (but not so markedly in Ireland), with rare exceptions, the imports are found on coastal strongholds, of varied strength and status, around the Irish Sea. This point should not be stressed too far, however, because fortified sites have been particularly attractive to excavators. It has also been suggested that some imports were brought to open beach markets, but this is hardly susceptible to proof. Of the few eastern find-spots in northern Britain, Dundurn and the fort at Clatchard Craig (Fife) could have been supplied from Dumbarton, via the head of Loch Lomond and thence by well-established routes into Strathearn and on to the Tay, while Craig Phadraig would have been accessible from Dunollie and thence largely by water up the Great Glen (see illus 3 above).

### 8.1.2 Glass imports

Another major class of exotic imported material comprised vessels of glass. The first systematic recognition of such imports in Celtic areas of Britain, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon England, was published in the same volume as that which had established the significance of the imports of Mediterranean wines and tableware. In particular relevance to the present survey, attention was drawn to a long known, but largely ignored, assemblage of imported glass from the small coastal fort of Mote of Mark (Harden 1956b, 149-50; Laing & Longley forthcoming).

Quite fortuitously, during the 1950s an exceptionally large collection of glass was excavated, along with imported pottery of classes A, B, D and E, from a small fort at Dinas Powys in south Wales (Alcock 1963). Subsequently, the corpus of imported glass has steadily increased as a result of excavations in both Wales and Scotland, many of which had been deliberately targeted on sites with historical references, or which on typological grounds appeared likely to be of Early Historic date. The most important of these excavations was the unusually large-scale research at Whithorn (summaries for Wales, E Campbell 1993; for Scotland, Alcock, L & EA 1990; for Whithorn, E Campbell 1997b).

Initially, the Dinas Powys glass had been dated to the 5th or 6th centuries. It was also considered that it had not come to the west and north as complete vessels, but as 'cullet' (broken fragments which would be recycled to make beads or inlays for trinkets). The implication was that the glass was imported as a very minor component on the back of the wine trade. These interpretations have now been rejected, but it has been necessary to mention them here because they recur in some recent literature.

The revised interpretations owe something to new finds, but the main inspiration has been Ewan Campbell's reconsideration of existing finds and their associations. It is now recognised that, on excavated sites, the appropriate chronological markers are not the pottery vessels of classes A and B, but those of classes D and especially E. This implies a date, not in the late 5th and early 6th centuries, but rather, in the later 6th, 7th, and

23  
Glass beaker  
fragments from  
Dinas Powys (1)  
and Whithorn (2)  
with, to the right  
(1a; 2a), recon-  
structions by Ewan  
Campbell.

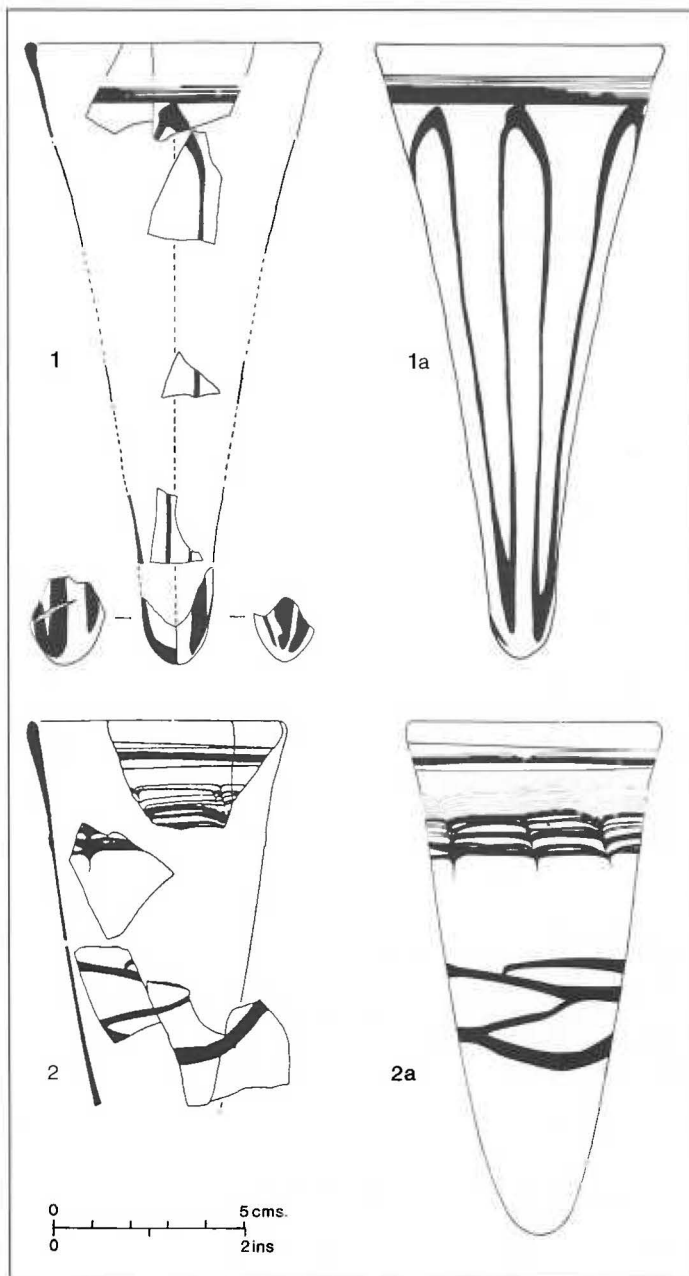
even perhaps the early 8th centuries. In other words, the glass is largely to be associated with the trade from Gaul rather than that from the Mediterranean.

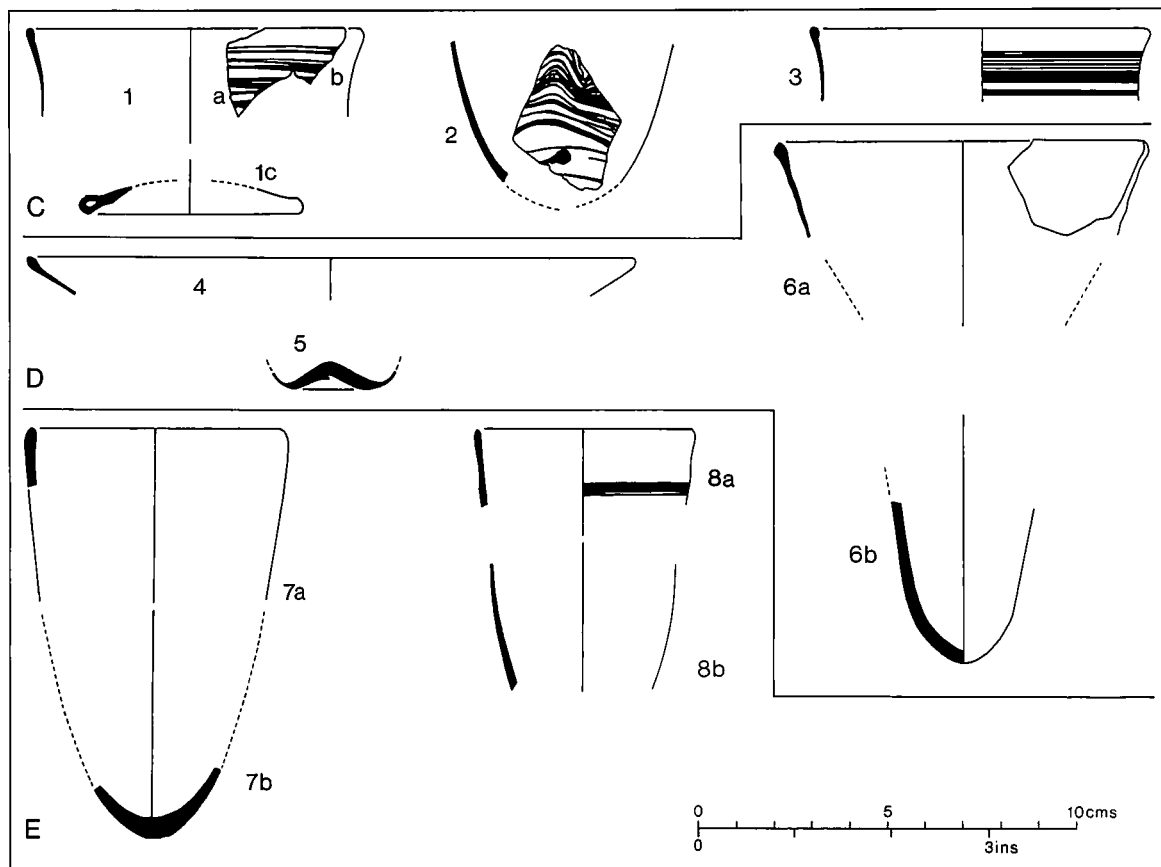
Secondly, the view that the imported glass comprised cullet rather than complete vessels has largely been abandoned. A major factor in this reconsideration was Campbell's reconstruction of the profile of a beaker from Dinas Powys (illus 23). Another influence has been a Swedish study comparing the glass occurring in the major fortified settle-

ment at Eketorp with that in the graves of the fort-dwellers: in contrast with the complete vessels in the graves, only small fragments occur in the settlement (Näsman 1984). Since there are no furnished graves in western and northern Britain, it appears that complete vessels should not be expected.

Thirdly, if the fragments—which often occur in quantity on excavations—represent complete vessels, it becomes clear that the importation of glass vessels was a major component in the later trade nexus. This has a profound social significance. Since the vessels were chiefly beakers and bowls for drinking, we can now fully appreciate 'the brimming glass vessels' of wine attributed to the warrior heroes of the *Gododdin* in their citadel at *Din Eidyn*, Edinburgh (Jarman 1987, 248).

The largest collection of glass comes from recent excavations at Whithorn (Campbell 1997b; here illus 24), and is appropriately discussed below (14.2.3). This brief technical description of the glass, even when supported by reconstruction drawings, gives no adequate impression of its aesthetic quality. At a purely objective level, we may remark on its obvious fragility, which must have caused major problems for its transport overseas. The implications are that it was precious, expensive, and of high social status. Subjectively, we may appreciate the delicacy, even elegance, of these drinking vessels, wholly appropriate for the leaders of a heroic society.





### 8.1.3 Export and trade

The wider economic implications of the imports have been little discussed. The essential question is: what were the products which northern Britain had to offer in return? The search for an answer must begin, not indeed in the north, but in south-west England, at the promontory stronghold of Tintagel (Thomas 1993). The reason for this is the outstanding numerical superiority of Tintagel in Mediterranean imports, especially the class B amphorae.

In general, the count of sherds found on an excavation is not a simple indicator of status: it needs to be considered in relation to the number of man-weeks of the excavation. To take a northern example: Dunollie yielded only a few class E sherds from a small-scale excavation, whereas Dunadd yielded very many in the course of three major campaigns. But such considerations cannot be applied to Tintagel, where at least 1500 class B vessels—as distinct from sherds—have been recognized (Thomas 1993, 93; Alcock 1995a, 141 for comparative numbers).

In the case of Tintagel, an obvious exportable commodity, which might have been exchanged for wine, is tin. This is a mineral in high demand in the Mediterranean and the Continent, but of very limited occurrence in nature, with Cornwall being the major

24  
Leading classes of  
glass vessels at  
Whithorn: Group  
C (1-3), D (4-6)  
and E (7-8) (after  
Ewan Campbell).

source (illus 25). It is very reasonable to think that supplies from local tin-streams were brought to Tintagel in exchange for wine in amphorae from the Mediterranean. The small-scale Insular distribution of Mediterranean wine in Wales, Ireland and northern Britain may largely have been carried out by cargo-boats from Tintagel.

25  
Map of natural  
resources  
(L. McEwan)



This cannot apply, however, to the second phase of trade, that of wine-in-cask from Gaul, which is inferred from the occurrence of class E pottery. This is absent from Tintagel, and also from other major site in the south-west, namely Cadbury Castle, Somerset, and Cadbury Congresbury (also Somerset); and although it does occur on lesser sites in the south-west peninsula and south Wales, the main focus of its distribution is in northern Britain and Ireland. This would fit well with Adomnán's account of the Gaulish ship at some major centre in Dál Riata in the late 6th century.

At this point, then, we come back to the question: what could northern Britain have exported, whether simply to Cornwall, or through Tintagel, or directly to the Continent?

We may readily rule out tin, but in Scotland, small deposits of gold, copper, and silver-bearing lead are widely scattered. Two examples must serve for many. Ready access to copper ores may have determined the location of the fortified metalworking centre of Mote of Mark, where the Urr Water flows into the Solway Firth (Macleod 1986, 132-3). And even today there are exploitable gold sources at Wanlockhead (Dumfries) and at Cononish (Perthshire) beside a major W-E route linking Loch Awe with the Tay drainage.

Of other northern commodities suitable for exchange, Thomas has drawn attention to the products of pastoralism in Ireland, and we may add Scotland as well: namely leather and wool, whether as raw material, or garments of various kinds such as jerkins (illus 32 below; Thomas 1990, 14-6). We may query the emphasis on woollen products, because sheep played only a minor role among the domestic animals of our period, as is demonstrated by the ratios of bones of domesticates recovered from excavations of Early Christian (in the chronological sense) sites in Ireland (McCormick 1983, 255, table 1). What we cannot doubt, however, is the availability of raw or finished products of cattle—cowhides and finer calf- and kid-skins and vellum. And from the islands of western Scotland, including Iona, we may add seal-skins, and the furs of newly-born seals.

With the mention of furs, we should recall that the main desirable features in items for long-distance trade are that they should be light, unbreakable or otherwise imperishable, and in the customer's eyes, luxurious. Among the natural products of the north which meet such criteria, furs are outstanding: not so much those of bear and beaver, but in terms of luxury, otter, sable, ermine and the winter coats of mountain hare, white with a subtle hint of purple. To these might be added the feathers of over-wintering geese, and the down of eiders, a bird prolific in northern waters. Finally, there are good quality pearls from the fresh-water mussels of cold northern streams.

This list is, of course, no more than suggestive of potential exports. Apart from Bede's mention of pearls (*HE* i, 1)—which does not necessarily refer to freshwater ones—we lack written evidence for possible exports from Britain (for the wider Irish evidence see James 1982, 376-8). By contrast, our knowledge of the flourishing fur trade between northern Europe and the Byzantine and Islamic worlds is almost entirely derived from written sources (Lombard 1969; Martin 1986). It is also from the written account of Ottar's visit to the court of King Alfred that we learn of the importance of furs, skins and feathers in north-western Europe (Sawyer 1977; Lund 1984).

Presumably the products of northern Britain were exchanged directly with Gallic sailors such as those encountered by Columba; or in a series of short voyages down the Irish Sea from one exchange station to another; or rarely, and that only in Mediterranean-phase imports, through Tintagel itself. What is certain is that we are dealing with a natural, not a monetary system. Except for the special case of Whithorn (14.2.3) coinage was virtually unknown along the west coast of northern Britain until the Viking period.

There is no similar evidence for luxury imports, by way of the North Sea, into Bernicia and Pictland. The major secular site to have been excavated in Bernicia, the royal centre of Yeavering, produced very few finds of any kind (15.2.5). This is also true of the Pictish forts of Clatchard Craig and Dundurn, which acquired small quantities of imported pottery (class E) and glass overland from Dál Riata.

The best evidence for secular trade to Northumbria comes indeed from an Anglian

settlement on the Fishergate site in York itself (Kemp 1996, espec 72-4). Period 3 at this site is attributed to the late 7th to mid-9th centuries. Regional trade included a small quantity of pottery from East Anglia. In addition, some 30% of the pottery is likely to have come from northern France and the Low Countries (Mainman 1993, 571-3; map, fig 240): a region significantly to the north of the origin-area of the class E pottery imported into western Britain. Glass vessels of Anglo-Saxon character probably came from northern France or the Rhineland. Lava querns from the Eifel region of the Rhineland may have been accompanied by a small quantity of pottery from that area. It is possible that the some of these Continental contacts were fostered by a colony of Frisian traders settled in York, and known from written sources (Kemp 1996, 65).

All this is very different from the evidence available in the north and west of Britain. One item, however, recalls the suggested importance of furs as possible exports from the north; namely 'the presence of beaver, and...of pine marten showing signs consistent with their having been prepared for furs' (Kemp 1996, 71).

#### 8.1.4 Coinage

The greatest economic difference between Northumbria and the kingdoms of the Britons, Picts and Scots lies, however, in their use of coins. A coin mint had been set up in York itself in the late 7th century, perhaps under the influence of the colony of Frisian traders in that city. Coin-finds are fairly common in Deira, but at first they are quite rare north of the Tees. With the expansion of Northumbria to the Forth and into south-west Scotland, however, coins appear in 'Greater Bernicia', especially at Whithorn.

Except for the Whithorn report, no complete lists of find-spots or of numbers of coins from individual sites is available (see Pirie (1986) and Cormack (1995)). Types of site range from fortresses (Bamburgh, Dunbar), through proto-urban centres (Whithorn), to monasteries and other ecclesiastical sites (Barhobble, Coldingham, Hexham), to so-called beach-markets (Luce Bay). Numbers range from the very common singletons, through 65 at Whithorn and 67 plus at Bamburgh, to the extraordinary bucket-hoard from Hexham with about 8000 coins.

Within the chronological range of our survey, two groups of coins are distinguished. The earlier ones, dated from the late 7th to the early 9th century, are traditionally known as *sceattas*. They were generally of silver, and bore on the obverse face the king's name, normally surrounding a cross. The reverse may bear a prancing beast (thought to be reminiscent of Germanic coin-motifs) and sometimes also the archbishop's name. In the last quarter of the 8th century a major innovation was the addition of the name of the moneyer or official responsible to the king for the striking of coins.

From early in the 9th century the *sceattas* were replaced by *styca*s. The most important characteristic of these was the progressive debasement of the silver coins with bronze—that is to say, a copper/tin alloy; and later with brass, a copper/zinc alloy. By the middle of the 9th century, indeed, 'the Northumbrian coinage was effectively a brass coinage'. It has been argued (Brooks 1987, 398), however, that there were 'biblical precedents for brass or bronze being regarded as a precious metal after gold or silver'. Moreover, the alloy gave the *styca* a 'shiny golden appearance'.

Given the very varied character of the find-spots, and the numerical range of individual discoveries, it is difficult to assess the economic and social significance of this coinage

in Greater Bernicia in pre-Viking times. Emphasis is sometimes placed on the frequency of discovery on ecclesiastical sites, including graveyards; but this is partly accounted for by the turning over of the soil in digging graves, partly by the extent to which competent, large-scale excavations in Northumbria have focused on ecclesiastical—and especially monastic—sites.

The Hexham bucket-hoard does suggest that a major church might accumulate considerable wealth, but this is hardly surprising when we consider the evidence for land-grants made to major churches; most notably those recorded by Stephen in his account of Wilfrid's foundation of Ripon (*VW*, xvii). But this does not help us to understand what a single *sceat* or *styca* might purchase; or how many would buy a well-equipped horse, a well-fashioned spear, a parcel of land, or a sturdy slave and his family.

One further, subjective, aspect of the introduction of coinage to Northumbria may be suggested: its importance in spreading the king's name throughout the kingdom, including recently acquired territories. The symbolic meaning of this was reinforced by the central cross, implying the support of the Church. It is commonly said of barbarian societies, that kings make wars and wars make kings. It may also be said that kings make coins, and coins make kings. Even though the Northumbrian coins lacked royal 'portraits', their dispersal throughout the kingdom may have done as much as annual circuits or progresses to enhance the peoples' awareness of kingship.

## 8.2 CRAFTS, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY

### 8.2.1 Metalworking and metal products

Apart from the actual products of fine metalworking (19 below), evidence for crafts and industry in mainland northern Britain is both scarce and scattered. At present, nothing has been published comparable to those enclosed settlements further to the south and west which had sheltered smiths and other craftworkers, such as Dinas Powys in south Wales (Alcock 1963) or Moynagh Lough in Ireland (Bradley 1993). Some sites in the north, however, do demonstrate evidence for metalworking and the production of luxury items. In Scotland, Mote of Mark is such a site, which produced moulds and glass inlays from an excavation in 1913 (Curle 1914). Unfortunately, a more recent excavation there was unpublished at the time of final preparation of this volume (now to be published as a further volume in this monograph series, Laing & Longley forthcoming); likewise the recent excavations at Dunadd (apart from an analysis of decorative motifs by Campbell & Lane 1993) did not reach publication until too late for full inclusion in the present work (Lane & Campbell 2001). Even from the extensive excavation of a major secular site, the royal estate centre of Yeavering, no industrial debris was recorded. Subsequently, a few crucible fragments were recovered fortuitously from the excavation of a henge monument some 200m distant from the royal site (Tinniswood & Harding 1991, 103-5).

A major obstacle to understanding the techniques of craftsmanship in silver and bronze is the non-match of numbers of crucibles and moulds recovered on excavated sites. Out of 19 published sites in Britain and Ireland, 17 yielded evidence for crucibles, but only nine had moulds. Moreover, only four sites had moulds in quantity (C Curle 1982); likewise four had many crucibles; but only one, Brough of Birsay had both in quantity. Since both crucibles and moulds must be present simultaneously in the casting process,

it is difficult to explain these observed discrepancies (19.3; illus 136 below).

The most obscure aspect of metalworking, however is the extractive side of the industry. This is probably because the sources in Britain were mostly on a small scale; and larger deposits have been swallowed up by later extractions (illus 25).

Mote of Mark provides an interesting, but enigmatic, case study, especially because it is less than 3km distant from a known copper mine (NGR NX 868528, Macleod 1990, 133). The defended site itself is very small, and much of its interior is uninhabitable because of rock outcrops. Visually, it is virtually indistinguishable from other rock bosses along the Urr estuary. It is only closely accessible from the sea at high tide—which may be counted a defensive feature. The richness of the site in metalworking, initially British and subsequently Anglian, is fully demonstrated by the quantity and variety of the moulds found there. It is therefore tempting to think that it was the combination of a secluded site, with access only at high tide, and the closeness of copper, which made an insignificant-seeming site one of great importance. (For further technical details about metalworking at Mote of Mark: Swindells & Laing 1980; Laing & Longley forthcoming).

Iron ores are far more common than those of silver, copper and tin, but little information is available on basic working methods. An interesting published site is that at Simy Folds, in Upper Teesdale, deep in the eastern Pennines, and at the southern limit of the present survey (Coggins, Fairless & Batey 1983). The site stands on a bench or levelling of the southern flank of Teesdale, at about 1250ft/380m OD. It consisted of four groups of yards, each with two or three buildings, linked to field walls. Calibrated radio-carbon dates of cal AD 750 and 790 ad suggest broadly a late 8th-century date for the settlement.

A known source of iron ore is about 1100yds/1km from the site, and there are extensive slag heaps in the vicinity, with radiocarbon dates of c 800 and 1100 ad (though the actual range could be wider). At Simy Folds, considerable quantities of smelting slag, together with fragments of furnace bottom, were recovered; but it is not entirely clear how these relate to the occupation of the settlement. This is because occasional fragments of slag were recovered from the walls of some buildings, or underlay minor structures, apparently implying that smelting had preceded their construction. On the other hand, some piles of slag lay against the walls, and must therefore be later, as must slag which overlies some areas of paving. Perhaps the most interesting observation is that, in addition to the deposits of smelting slag, a small quantity of smithing slag and ash overlay a small hearth in the corner of a building.

It would appear that this small community was exploiting local resources to smelt (ie reduce) local ores, and was also carrying out a little smithing to produce, for instance, a socketed spike or ferrule, and a ring. Apart from the ore itself, two important natural resources could have been available locally. The first was wood for charcoal, and especially birch, which is reputed to make excellent charcoal. The second, more speculative, is that the Pennine streams might have been exploited for water-power, with simple water-wheels driving the bellows needed to create a forced draught to maintain the constant temperature required in smelting (Coggins 1986, 52-3; 57-60).

8.2.2 Iron products

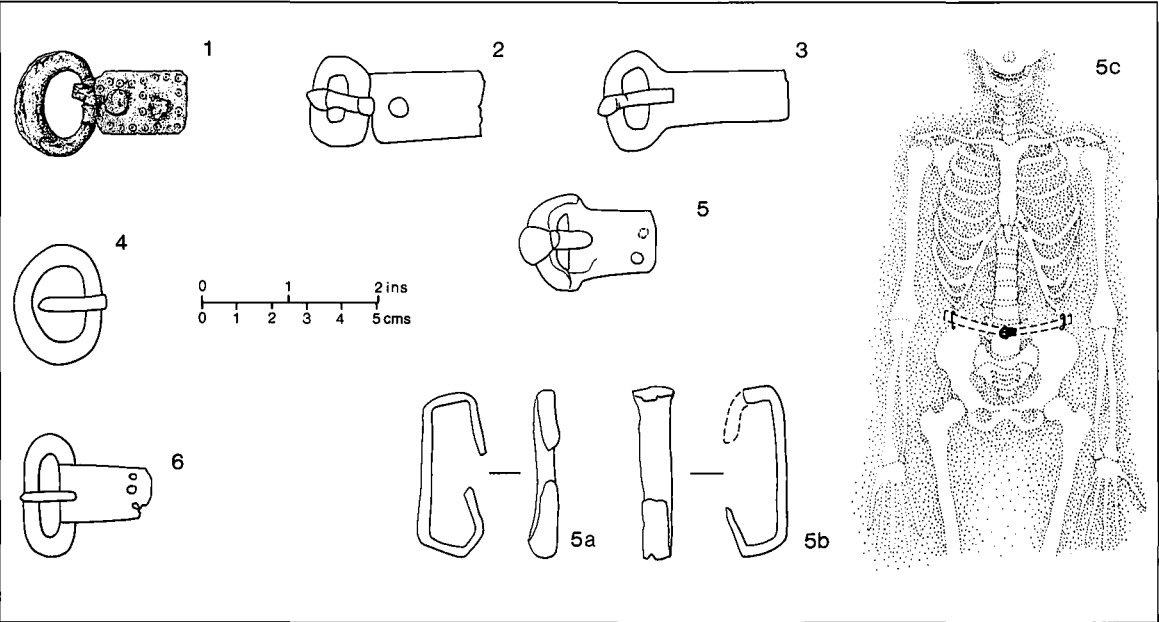
In general terms, the products of the blacksmith fall into three broad categories. There can be little doubt that the greatest use of iron was for the making of weapons. This emerges most clearly from pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, of which Norton in Cleveland is the example for our area; but there is no reason to doubt that this was also true of the Britons, the Picts and the Scots. Weapons are treated at length below (12.1).

The other two categories comprise, firstly, personal items, and, secondly, tools and other objects of utility. Personal objects are best represented in graves. Tools by contrast, are principally recorded from settlements, including fortified sites. Knives for personal— as opposed to martial—use are ubiquitous. The present account makes no claim to be comprehensive, nor does it offer detailed typologies, which would be out of keeping with the overall character of this survey. Instead it aims to provide an illustrated overview of the blacksmith’s work.

Belt-buckles

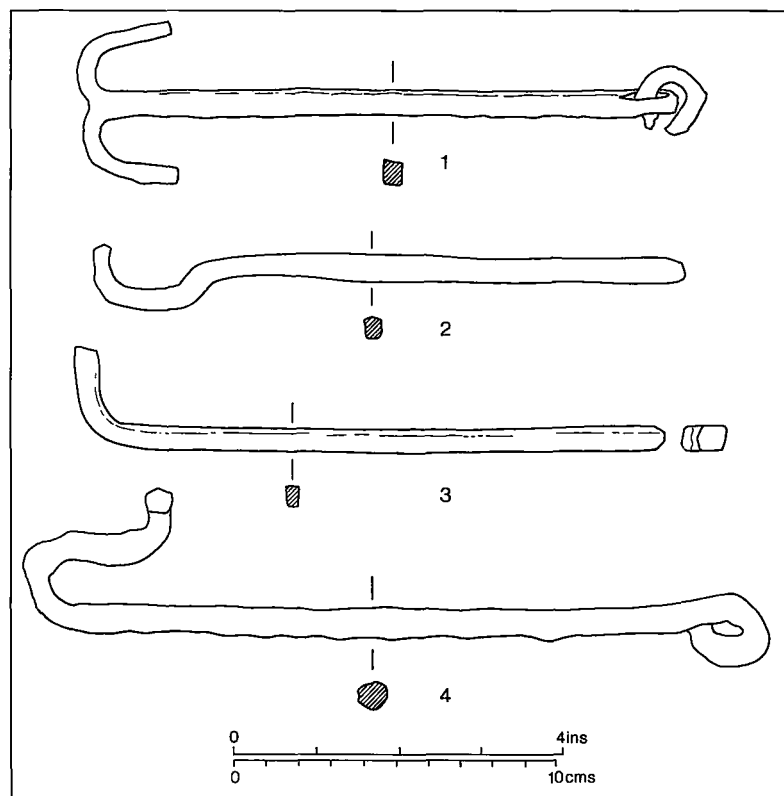
A common personal item in Anglo-Saxon graves was the belt-buckle (illus 26). These may consist simply of a D-shaped loop, with the butt-end of the tongue wrapped round the straight bar of the D. As on many simple modern examples, one end of the belt was doubled back on the buckle, and then fastened by stitching. More elaborate buckles had a thin iron plate wrapped round the buckle and then riveted to clamp the belt (illus 26, 5 from Yeavinger). The belt itself, of leather or cloth, varies in width at the buckle from 12mm (0.5in) to 18mm (0.7in). But the presence of iron sliders either side of the buckle at Yeavinger implies that a belt measuring only 18mm (0.7in) at the buckle may widen to 37mm (1.5in) around the wearer’s waist (illus 26, 5c). At Dunadd and Norton, very simple dress fasteners took the form of oval or D-shaped iron rings with substantial tongues (illus 26, 6).

26  
Belt-buckles from Norton (1-4); Yeavinger, grave B2 (5a, b: after Hope-Taylor) and Milfield North, grave 1 (6). Reconstruction of Yeavinger belt buckle *in situ* (5c).



### Latch-lifters and girdle-hangers

An interesting group of iron objects is generally grouped together as latch-lifters and girdle-hangers, in effect a sub-class of keys (illus 27). Girdle-hangers are frequently found in pairs in female graves in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. They are normally of bronze, suggesting a measure of wealth, though some from Norton, occurring singly, were of iron (illus 27, 1). The form is a long shaft, perhaps with a suspension ring at one end, and at the other a double U-shaped hook, rather like an anchor. There has been a recent trend to describe these as 'mock-keys'. Such scepticism is unjustified, however, because as long ago as 1883, Romilly Allen illustrated two entirely characteristic 'girdle-hangers', together with their appropriate wooden locks, from China (Allen 1883, figs 3 & 4; note also, in fig 2, a Norse example with a somewhat different lock-mechanism).



27  
Latch-lifters from  
graves at Norton;  
1) grave 29.3;  
2) grave 35.5;  
3) grave 40.5;  
4) grave 68.3.

ironwork from the 1929 excavations at Dunadd (Duncan 1982, fig 26, GP 305). The Dunadd object has only a simple projection from the main stem, unlike the more complicated configuration of most latch-lifters; but so has that from Norton grave 40.5 (here illus 27, 3)—incidentally, the richest of the Norton female graves (Sherlock & Welch 1992, 76-7 & 148-9). It is possible, of course, that in each case a more elaborate terminal has been broken off.

Both girdle-hangers and latch-lifters have generally been associated with noble and/or wealthy women. It has to said, in relation to Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, that sometimes the latch-lifter appears to be the major factor in determining both the sex and the status

Latch-lifters, by contrast are normally of iron, the form being a long rod, bent in either curved or rectangular configurations (illus 27, 2-4). Their appearance suggests a functional, rather than an ornamental, purpose, which has sometimes been attributed to girdle-hangers. Without attempting a detailed description of the method of operation, it seems reasonable to think that the rod might have been inserted through a slot in the face of a door in order to lift a latch on the inside.

Despite their Roman origin, post-Roman girdle-hangers in northern Britain appear to be exclusively Germanic/Anglo-Saxon. This is also considered to be the case of latch-lifters. But a probable example of the latter has been illustrated (though not recognised as such) by H Duncan among the

of the skeletons. The argument is that noble women were guardians of jewellery and other wealth, preserved in locked chests to which they held the key. As a simple observation, however suitable a latch-lifter might have been for a door, it would have been a clumsy instrument for a chest. It is tempting to suggest that both latch-lifters and girdle-hangers, in the hands of a suitable matron, gave access to the sleeping-quarters of the women, while the men, *Beowulf*-fashion, slept in the hall.

## Knives

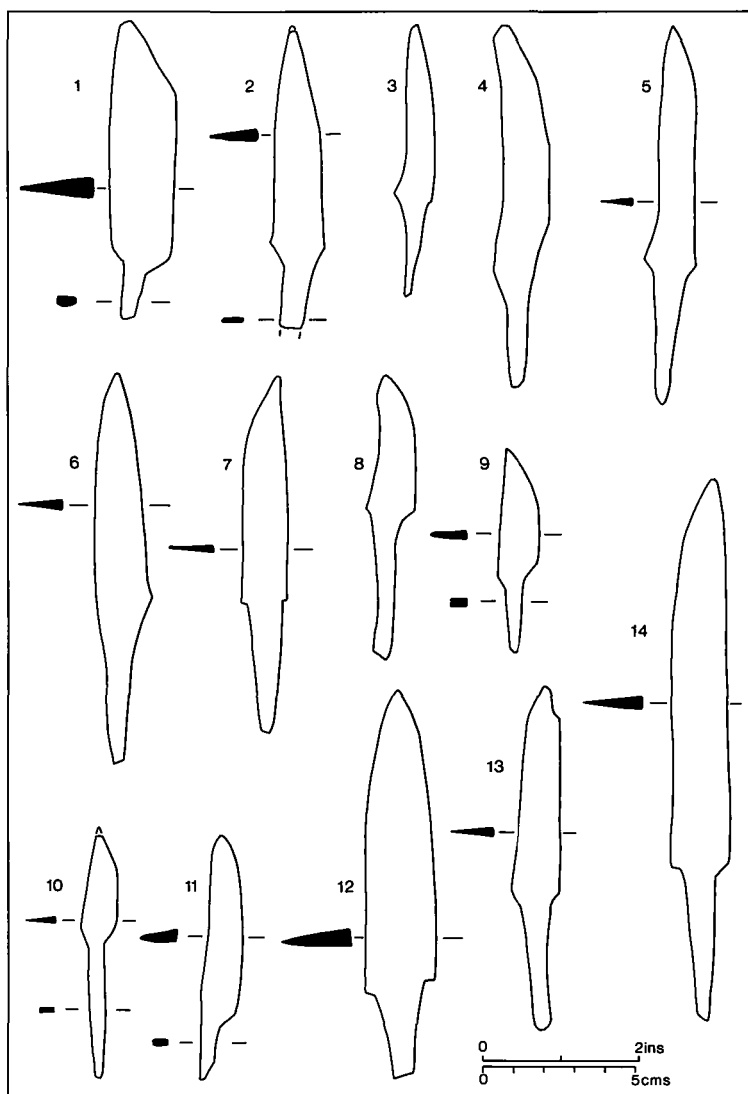
The commonest personal item of iron, whether in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries or Celtic settlements, was undoubtedly a small, single-edged, tanged knife with a tapered triangular cross-section (illus 28). The distinction between knives intended primarily for personal use, and those for martial use is necessarily an arbitrary one: a quite small blade, while handy about the person, can be used to cause fatal injuries, whereas a blade 127mm (5in) long can become clumsy. The size of blades of the knives illustrated here ranges from 38mm (1.5in) to 132mm (5.2in).

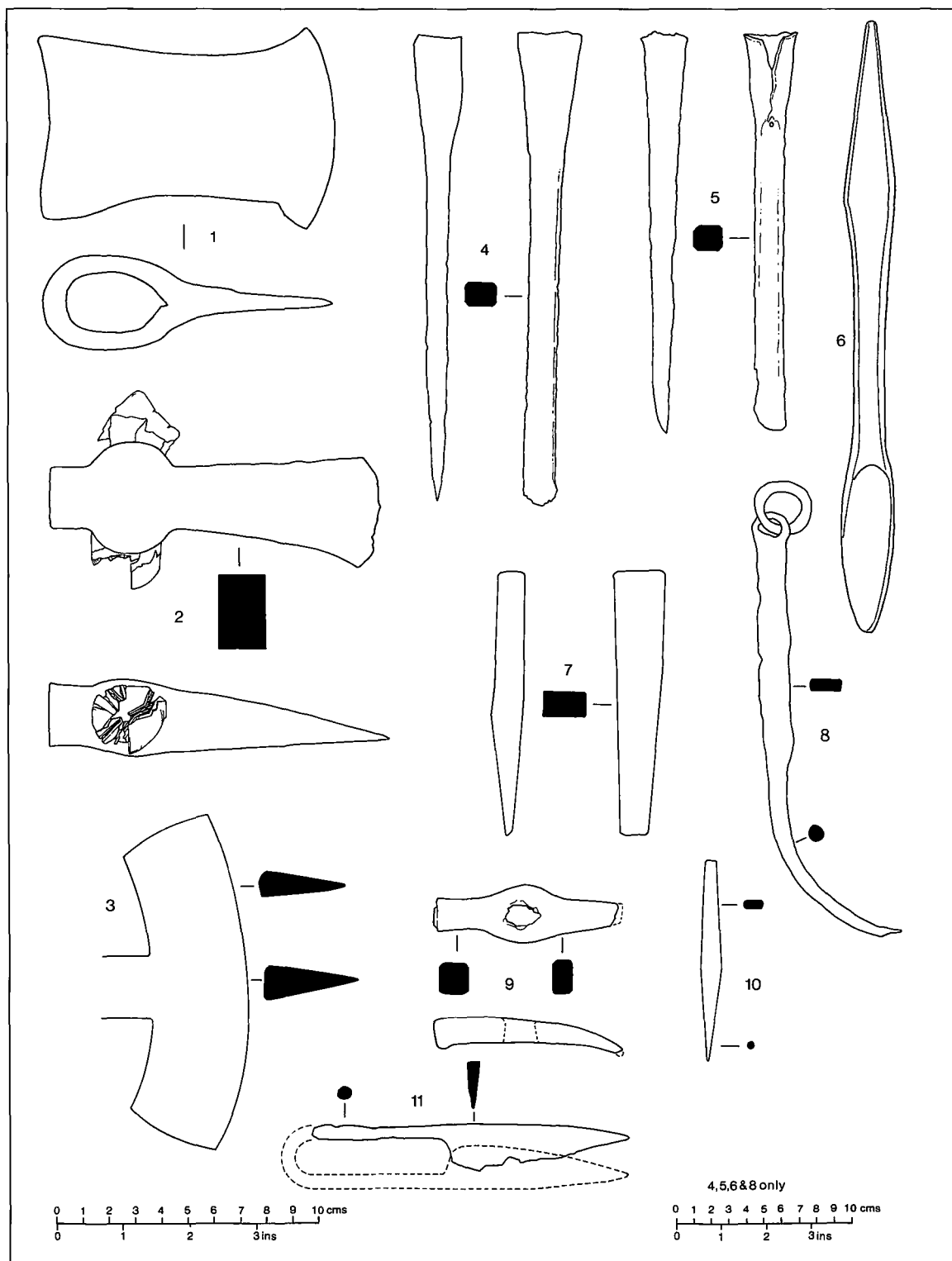
It might be thought that there would be little variety of form among the blades, but this is far from the case. For the knives in the Norton cemetery, a six-fold classification is proposed (Sherlock & Welch 1992, 51). Since this is based ultimately on graves in Kent and the Trier region, it may reasonably be taken as representative of Germanic (including Anglo-Saxon) knives. But small iron knives are also common throughout Celtic Britain and Ireland, and for these Laing has proposed a seven-fold typology, which only partly overlaps the Germanic one (Laing 1975, 287-9). Moreover, at least one class illustrated here, that with the sharply-angled back (illus 28, 1), does not conform closely to either classification.

In principle, establishing a typology should be simple, because only two characteristics need to be taken into account: the blade, whether straight or convexly-curved; and the back, which may be straight, curved, slightly angled, or strongly angled. In practice, it is not always possible to establish the original

28

Iron knives from Dundurn (1), Dunollie (2), Buiston (3, 4, 8, 14), Dunadd (9, 11, 13) and Norton (5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14).





shape of the blade, because many blades have been honed to a concave curve by frequent sharpening. The illustrations here present a representative series, arranged in relation to the configuration of the backs, and displaying various degrees of honing. As for the chronology which might be based on this typology, we may note the wry comment that 'many supposedly 7th-century knife forms were already being made and deposited [at Norton] within the second half of the 6th century' (Sherlock & Welch 1992, 51).

Particular attention is drawn to knives from Norton and Dunadd, which are characterized by a straight back incurved near the tip (illus 28,13). Apart from the Anglian and Dál Riata examples, this form is also known in the Trier region of Germany. Presumably the intention of the sharp point was to make incisions in some tough substance such as an animal skin.

As regards the social context of the knives, it is generally considered that they were carried by both sexes, and virtually at all ages. Certainly in Anglo-Saxon graves they can be accompanied by elaborate jewellery and other items regarded as exclusively female. But among the Celtic peoples of the north and the west, there is no such evidence from association. Samuel Johnson, commenting on social customs in western Scotland as they were 30 years before his visit in 1773, remarked that 'the Highlander wore his knife as a companion to his dirk or dagger, and when they sat down to meat, the men who had knives, cut the flesh into small pieces for the women' (Johnson/Chapman 1930, 51). What we cannot know is whether this custom had its roots in the Early Historic period.

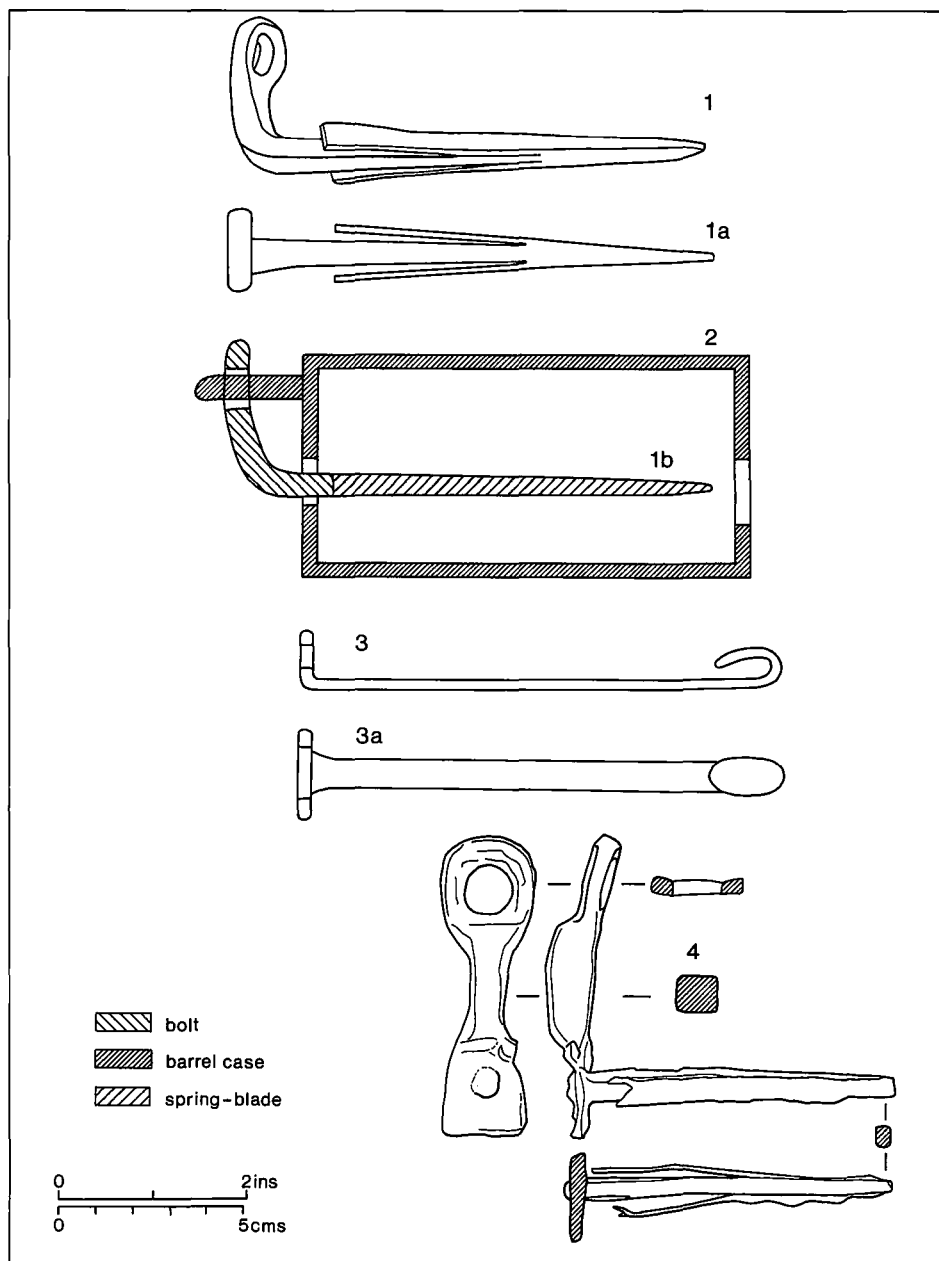
Iron tools were very rarely deposited in Anglian graves. On settlements too, it is normally only as a result of accidental loss that they become available to the archaeologist. Crannogs—that is, settlements founded on artificial islands—often yield an interesting haul, because of the original difficulty of recovering objects lost in the surrounding water. Some knives have already been illustrated from the Buiston crannog, Ayrshire (illus 28; see 16.4.1 for an account of the site). Appropriately for a wooden building, the early excavations also yielded a substantial felling axe (illus 29, 1); a spoon bit, needed to drill holes for wattled walls (illus 29, 6); and a possible chisel or punch. The recent excavations at Buiston added a possible carpenter's axe (Crone 1998). Apart from these crannog-finds, the fort of Dunollie yielded a T-shaped axe, usually regarded as a woodworker's or carpenter's axe (illus 29, 3). On some Pictish sculptured stones such axes are also wielded by centaurs.

Particular interest attaches to the working-parts of barbed-bolt padlocks from Buiston and Dundurn (illus 30). These consist of a body or barrel of circular or oblong cross-section, which has a hasp protruding at one end. Both ends of the barrel have openings: into the opening below the hasp, a rod flanked by two or four spring blades may be inserted, allowing a hook at the end of the rod to engage with the hasp, thus closing the lock. Into the opening at the other end of the barrel, a key may be inserted to compress the springs, allowing the rod to be withdrawn, thus disengaging it from the hasp.

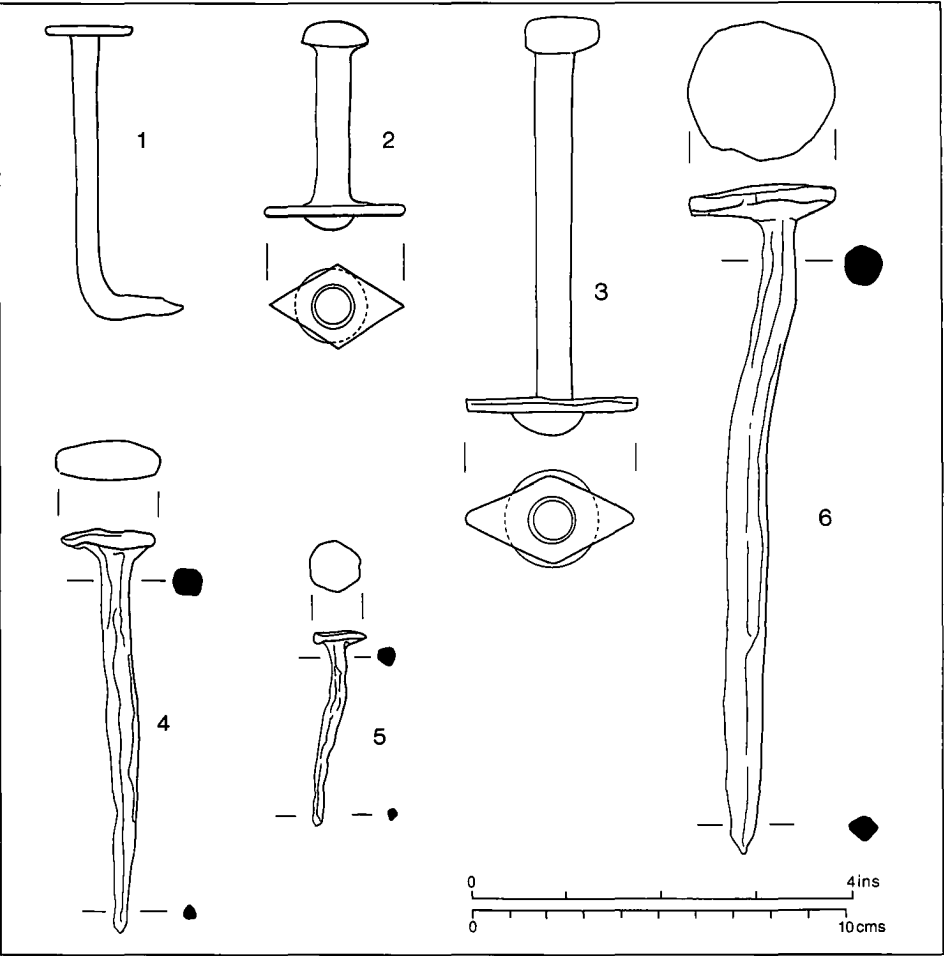
Such barrel padlocks appear in Roman Britain, and continue through the Early Medieval period into the High Middle Ages. They are by no means an Insular object, for Romilly Allen, in a footnote to the Buiston example, wrote 'Padlocks with barbed bolts are almost the only kind used all over China and India at the present day' (Munro 1882, 226, n 1). The Dundurn and Buiston locks are quite substantial, for the length of the rod with springs implies minimum barrel lengths of 80mm (3.2in), and 105mm (4.2in) respectively. These would seem more suitable for doors than for chests.

29 (opposite)  
Miscellaneous iron tools: axes (1, 2), punches (4, 5) and spoon-bit (6) from Buiston; woodman's axe, partly restored (3), chisel (7), ?jeweller's hammer (9) and awl (10) from Dunollie; fragment of bucket handle (7, 8) and fragment of shears (11) from Dunadd.

30  
 Barbed-bolt  
 padlock fragments:  
 1) padlock spring,  
 Buiston (as drawn  
 by Munro 1882,  
 fig 237);  
 2) conjectural  
 cut-away recon-  
 struction of the  
 Buiston lock;  
 3, 3a) two aspects  
 of a conjectural  
 key;  
 4) Fragmentary  
 spring mechanism,  
 Dundurn.



The iron inventory also includes punches and chisels, for instance from Buiston, Dunollie and Dunadd; several awls from Buiston; and an unusually small hammerhead, possibly for fine metalworking, from Dunollie (illus 29, 9). Surprisingly rare are pairs of shears, represented here with a single leg from Dunadd (illus 29, 11, after Craw 1930, fig 5:9; Duncan 1982, fig 16). As might be expected, on sites with evidence for timber-work nails may be common. Those from Yeavinger are quite small, whereas the timber-reinforced rampart round the citadel of Dundurn produced some quite massive nails (illus 31).

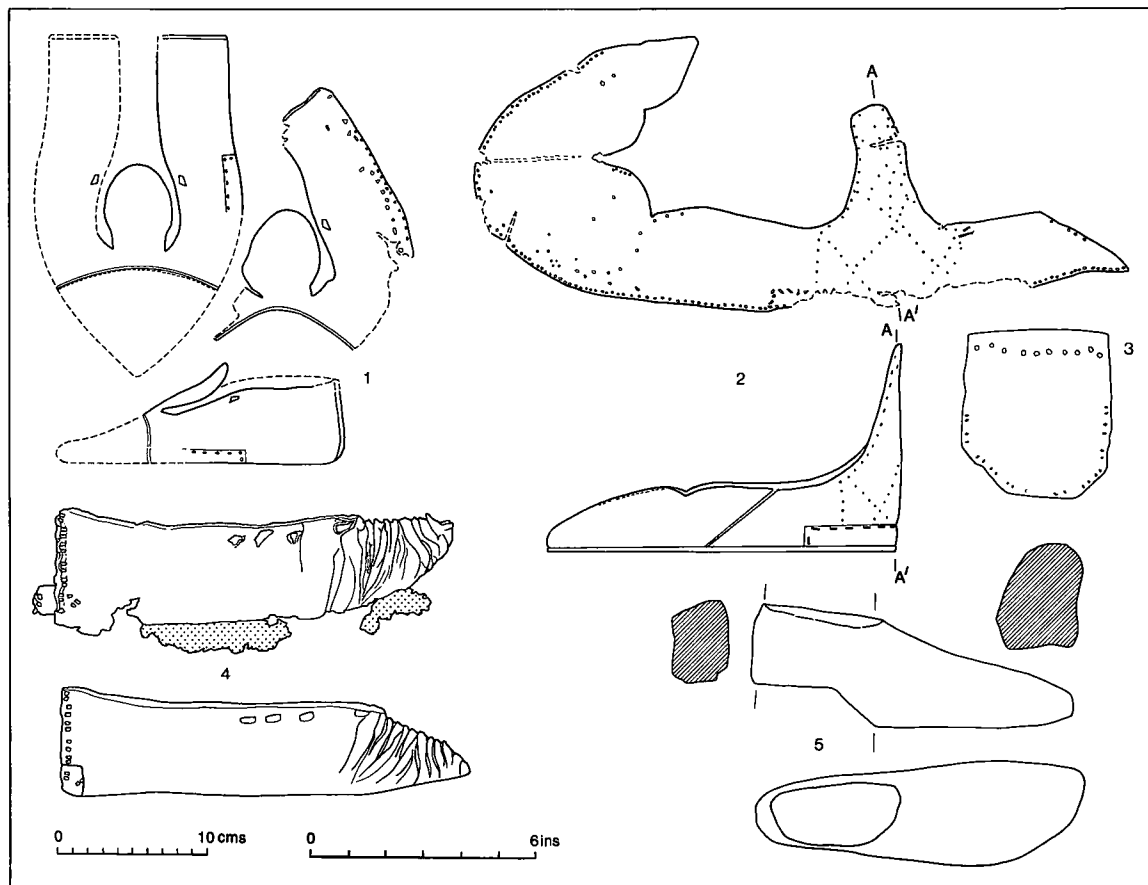
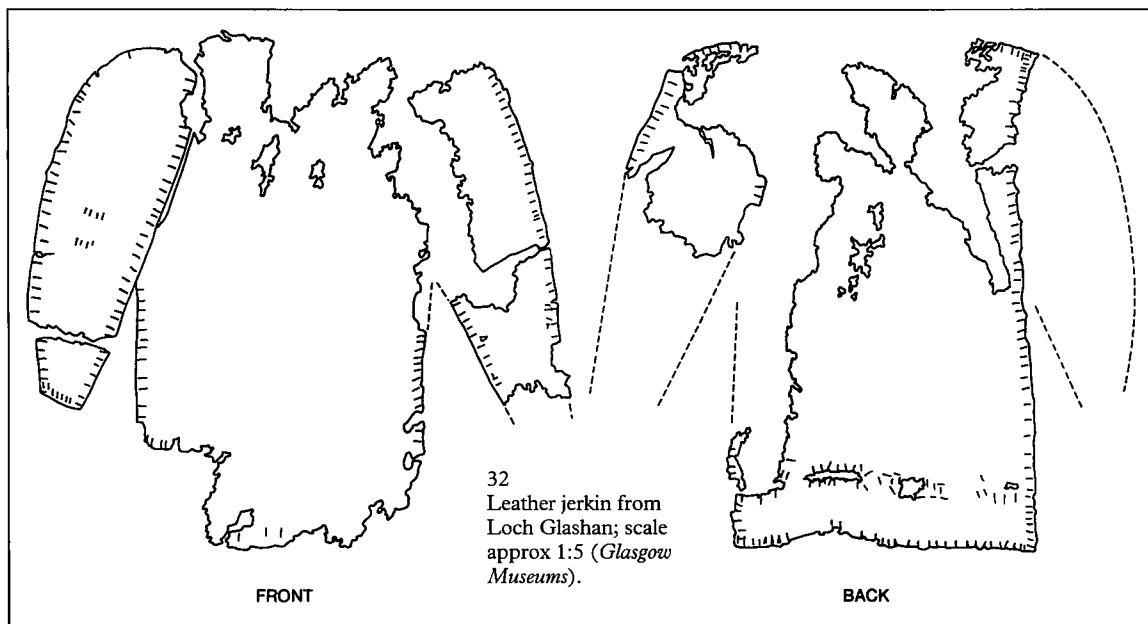


31  
Iron bolts and nails  
from Yeavinger  
(1-3) and  
Dundurn (4-6).

8.2.3 Organic materials

From the use of iron, we may turn to organic materials: leather, wool, bone and antler, and wood being the principal ones. To judge from the numbers of cattle bones discovered on excavated sites, leather would have been available in quantity and quality ranging from the finest of calf-skins for making vellum, to the toughest of mature hides. Unfortunately, the survival of leather artefacts normally requires a damp environment, such as a ditch, or the environs of a crannog. Even in favourable circumstances, it is rare to find anything other than off-cuts. This was certainly the case in the 19th-century excavation at Buiston (Munro 1882, 233).

More recently, however, there have been some remarkable discoveries, the most notable being a jerkin from the crannog in Loch Glashan, well-preserved by water-logging (RCAHMS 1988, 205-8). The remains were the front and back panels, with holes for thonging down each side, and the two sleeves (illus 32). Without allowing for shrinkage, the measurements are: front/back, from side to side, 430mm (17in), and from the crest of the shoulder to the hem, 610mm (24in). The sleeve length is 410mm (16in). About 100mm (4in) above the hem at the front was a row of holes probably for a draw-string,



and there were holes along the hem as well. Part way down one sleeve was a small cluster of holes, perhaps for a badge or insignia.

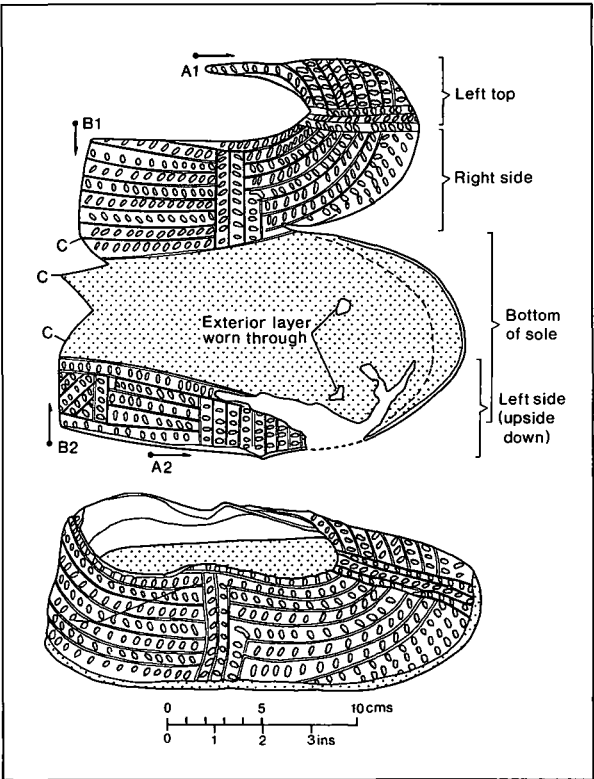
Shoes

Shoes, in a more-or-less fragmentary condition, have been found occasionally, for instance at Loch Glashan, in the lower levels of Vallum Ditch 1 at Iona, and in the recent excavations at Buiston (illus 33). Among miscellaneous fragments and off-cuts from the Ionan monastery, it was possible for Dr W Groenman van Waateringe to recognize one side of a purse, with ten tie-holes at its upper edge; and shoe-fragments sufficiently large to allow the paper reconstruction of three shoes, two of which are illustrated here. Predominantly they were made from the hide of mature cattle, but horse, red deer, sheep/goat and seal also occurred, in that order of frequency. The uppers of the shoes were of one or two pieces, joined by stitching to each other and to the sole. A characteristic feature was the high heel-stiffener on some examples. Punched decoration was rare (van Waateringe in Barber 1981, 318- 28).

At Buiston, a rather simpler shoe has been reconstructed from three fragments by Dr Waateringe (in Crone 1998). This appears to be a one-piece shoe, with the sides raised from a sole which is now missing (illus 33, 4). The heel was closed by a coarse thong, while the front seam was finely stitched, pulling the leather together in a number of folds. Across the instep there were three holes for a thong or strap. Appropriately, a carved wooden shoe-last has been identified at Buiston (illus 33, 5), and has been compared with one from the Irish royal crannog of Lagore.

Altogether more remarkable, in terms of the circumstances of discovery and the degree of preservation, is a complete shoe, found in a damp hollow quite close to the rocky summit of the fort of Dundurn (illus 34). The shoe itself is essentially cut from two pieces of leather: a fine inner skin about 1mm thick, and the outer tooled layer, 2.5mm thick, set flesh side to flesh side, and probably glued. Each layer was first cut to shape, then the outer was decorated with parallel lines scribed by a two-pointed tool and infilled with punched tooling. The toe end was then curled up to meet the upper and then sewn; the left top was sewn to the left side, and the heel and two sides were likewise sewn. The exploded drawing should make this process clear. This fine piece of the cobbler's craft was worn until holes developed in the sole.

34  
Leather single-piece shoe from Dundurn: below, as recovered; above, expanded view.



33 (opposite, bottom)  
Leather shoes  
from Iona (1-3)  
and Buiston (4),  
and wooden last  
from Buiston (5).

## Weaving

Evidence for woven garments, and indeed for the craft of weaving itself, is difficult to find. Occasionally, as at Buiston crannog, rather nondescript timber beams have been claimed as fragments of looms. Moreover, some antler artefacts may have been intended as spindles for spinning woollen threads, but the discs of bone, antler, or ceramic which were commonly used elsewhere to give momentum to the spindle are very rare on sites in Dál Riata and among the northern Britons; they have, however, been found more frequently among the Picts and in Bernicia.



35  
Woollen hood  
from Orkney,  
C14-dated to AD  
250-615 (*National  
Museums of  
Scotland*).

In view of the scarcity of spinning and weaving equipment, the discovery of an actual garment in a reasonable state of preservation is as astounding as that of the leather jerkin from the Loch Glashan crannog. The woollen object is a hood (illus 35), found in a bog in St Andrews's parish, Orkney. The hood is believed to have been woven on an upright loom. It was richly decorated with long tassels and a tablet-woven band. This was originally dated as Viking, but with 'no direct evidence as to its date'. Recently it has been radiocarbon dated within the bracket 3rd-7th century ad (Henshall 1952; Foster 1996, 55).

Strictly speaking, this is outside the geographic range of the present survey; but it immediately recalls Pictish figures with long sleeveless hooded cloaks. Two of them are hunting with crossbows; one from Shandwick is stalking a deer, the other from St Vigean's is ambushing a boar (illus 51 below). And on a cross-stele from St Madoes, three riders wear similar cloaks (*ECMS*, 295; *RCAHMS* 1994, 103).

The relative scarcity of spinning-whorls and loom parts prompts the suggestion that woollen garments might have been made of felt: that is, a fabric made not by weaving, but by using the natural tendency of fibres of wool, and fur or hair, to matt together under rolling and pressing. Such a fabric can be very warm, and if the natural oils of the wool are retained, it is also rain-proof. It would have been ideal for making riding- or hunting-cloaks.

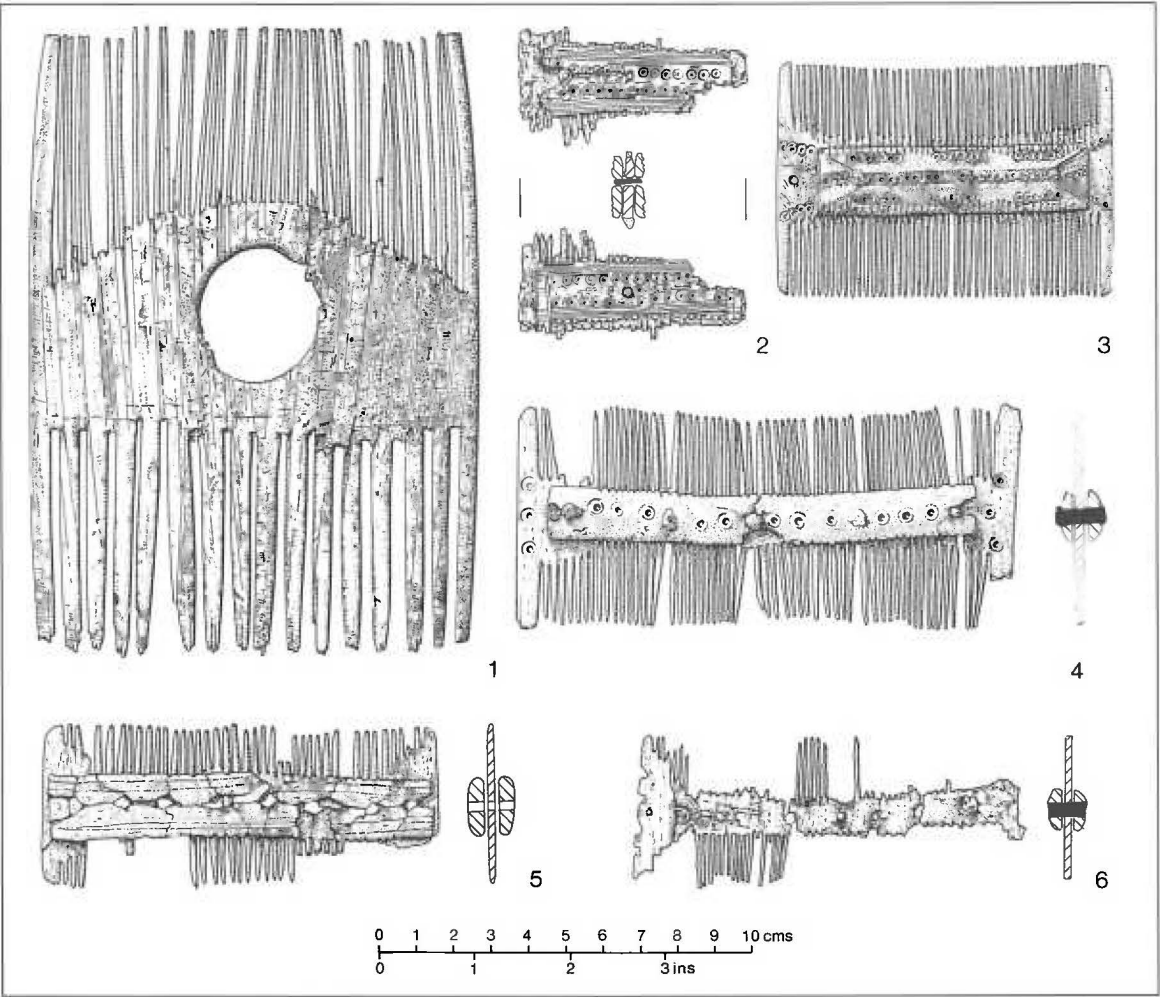
## Bone and antler

Bone and antler were widely available, and were correspondingly widely used for a range of objects, both utilitarian and decorative (general survey: MacGregor 1985).

Tool handles and needles, for instance, fall in the first category, while pins may fall in either, in that some have quite decorative heads. Among the Britons at Mote of Mark, and the Dál Riatans at Dunadd and Dunollie, rather short pins with bulbous heads were used as dies to make clay moulds for casting simple pins of bronze (19.2 below).

Antler was favoured, because of its tensile strength, for making composite combs, not only throughout Britain and Ireland, but widely in Europe as well. Examples are illustrated here from Anglian, British, and Scottic contexts (illus 36). The combs consist of rows of thin slices of antler (the tooth-plates), held between narrow side-plates, and normally fastened with iron pegs. In the period of this survey, there are normally two rows of teeth of even size, although on Roman—and also Viking and later—combs, it was normal to have one fine and one coarser row. The side-plates and end-plates are usually decorated with ring-and-dot ornament. In pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, composite combs occur in both female and male graves, so we must conclude that the combs had no gender implication.

36  
Two-sided combs of ivory (1) and antler (2-6) from: St Cuthbert's coffin (1), Dunollie (2), Buiston (3) and Norton Anglian cemetery (4-6).



Combs may, however, have had ceremonial or religious significance. That is indicated by the placing of a comb among the relics of St Cuthbert (below, 22.3.1; 22.3). This was indeed a rare type: a one-piece comb of elephant ivory, suggesting that it had come as a gift from the Mediterranean. In the early 620s AD, when Edwin of Northumbria was still hesitating about accepting Christianity, Pope Boniface wrote to Edwin's queen, Æthelburh, who was already a Christian, sending her a silver mirror and an ivory comb,

coupling the gift with 'the blessing of St Peter, prince of the apostles, and your protector' (*HE* ii, 11).

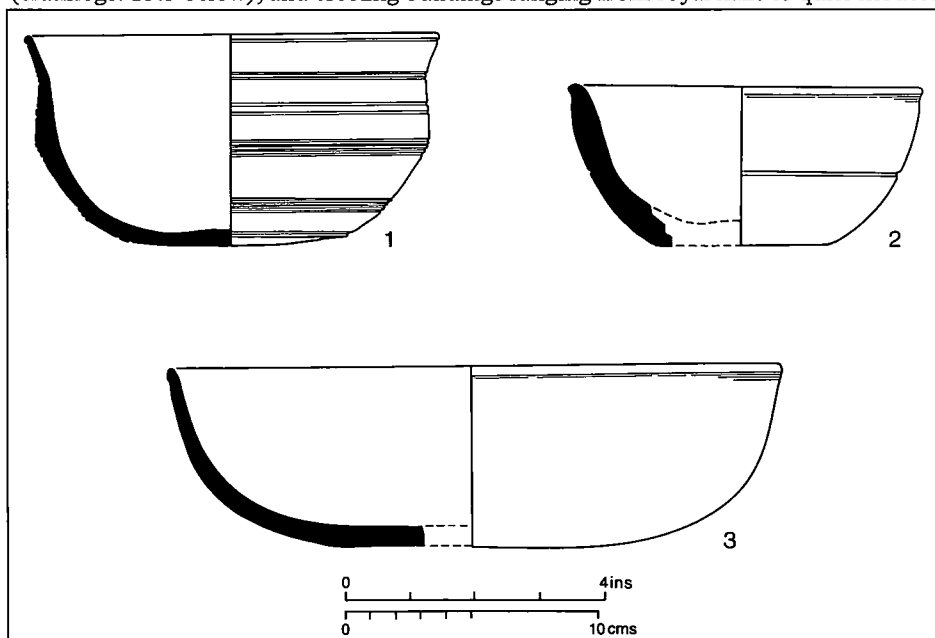
From these early Christian examples, it is tempting to extrapolate backwards into an essentially pre-Christian mentality, as it survived in early British (ie Welsh) tales and romances. The romance of Culhwch and Olwen has come to us in a redaction of the later 11th century; but it goes back to a time of giants and of a legendary Arthur (Roberts 1992). The first boon which Culhwch asked of his cousin Arthur was to have his hair trimmed (*Mabinogion*, 100). And when Culhwch and his companions went wooing the Chief Giant's daughter Olwen, they did so with pomp and brave combs set in their hair (*ibid*, 112). Behind such actions lie primitive beliefs in the magical significance of hair- and nail-cuttings, and the personal—indeed intimate—acts which are involved. These attempts to probe into the minds of the makers and users of antler combs are obviously highly speculative.

By contrast, there is little need for speculation about an object from the early excavations at the Buiston crannog, despite the excavator's description of it as 'a curiously-shaped object of bone, the use of which is unknown to me' (Munro 1882, 217 with fig 216). This is now recognized as a trigger-nut for a crossbow, which has been rather crudely carved from antler; alternatively, it may be unfinished (MacGregor 1976). Three iron arrowheads, suitable for a crossbow, were also recovered in Munro's excavations (12.1.4 below). Another antler trigger-nut, found unstratified at Urquhart Castle, may have come from the Early Historic vitrified fort rather than from the medieval masonry castle.

### Timber products

Another important natural resource was timber. This was used, often in great quantities, for constructing or reinforcing fortifications (13 below), making artificial islands (crannogs: 13.5 below), and erecting buildings ranging from royal halls to quite modest

37  
Lathe-turned  
wooden bowls  
from Iona (1-2)  
and Buiston (3).



peasant houses (15 and 16 below). Many of these are known only from the stains left in the ground by decaying uprights, or the charred remains of beams in ramparts destroyed by fire.

In circumstances favourable for the preservation of wood, such as water-logged ditches, or the lakes and swamps around crannogs, a wide range of items may be recovered, such as plough stilt, mallets, stave-built barrels, churns and handles for tools: the recent excavations of the Buiston crannog has yielded a particularly well-illustrated collection (Crone 1998). Special interest attaches to bowls from Buiston and Iona (illus 37), for these have been made by turning on a pole-lathe, as is demonstrated by the cone-shaped wasters left by the process. This type of lathe had superseded the earlier bow-lathe, which is known from the Roman period (for technical details, Barber 1981, 328-35).

### 8.2.4 New technologies: mills and mortar-mixers

Two other technical innovations may conveniently be mentioned here: watermills, and rotary mortar mixers. The first recognition of an Early Historic watermill in England was that at Tamworth in Mercia. This was the subject of rescue excavations in 1971 and 1978, which yielded substantial remains of the timberwork of a two-storey mill: that is, a wheelhouse set below the general ground surface, and containing a horizontal wheel which powered the millstone in the upper-storey millhouse itself (Rahtz & Meeson 1992, espec figs 92-100 for reconstruction; pp 122-4 for chronology).

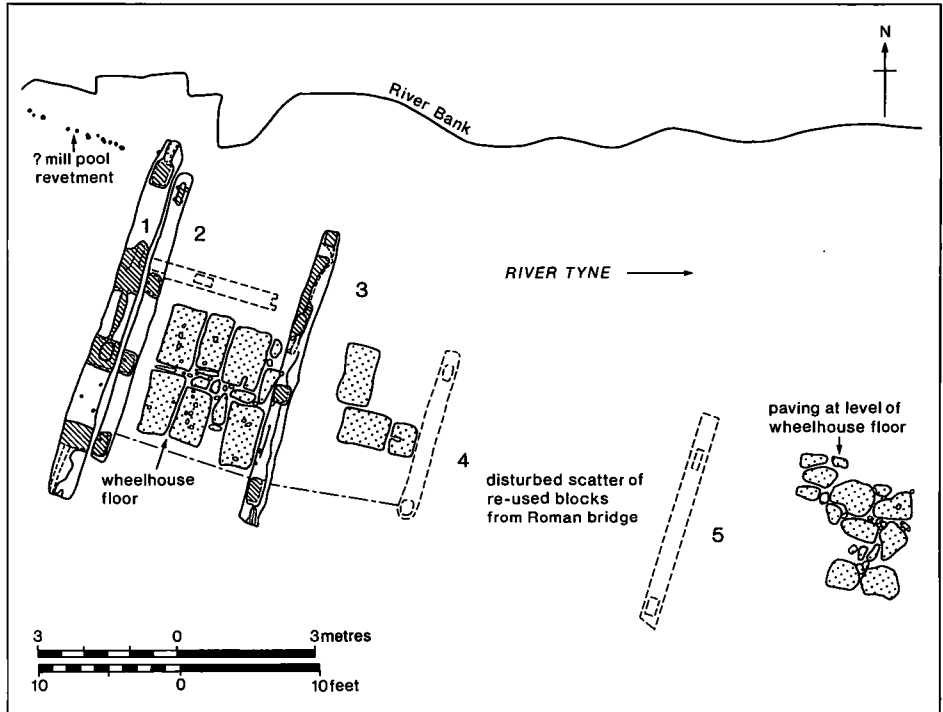
Before the full publication of the Tamworth mill in 1992, it was already apparent that simple mill-structures with horizontal wheels were quite common in Ireland. Thus Baillie was able to publish a map (1982, fig 9.4) of 13 mills datable between AD 630 and 930 on the evidence of dendrochronology. It is suggested that these had possibly been introduced from France or Spain (Edwards 1990, 63-4). Similar mills, mistakenly known as 'Norse' mills, have been in use in the Northern Isles of Scotland into the present century.

This brief excursus has been necessary to demonstrate our very patchy knowledge of Early Medieval watermills, and thereby to emphasize the great significance of discoveries at Corbridge since 1991 (Hardie & Ruston 1996, 20-22; illus 38 here). The site in question is by the north bank of the River Tyne, just below the confluence of the Cor Burn, which may indeed have provided the main flow for the mill-wheel. The remains of the mill have been severely damaged in flood-phases of the river, which explains the infrequency of discoveries of early mills. Enough has survived at Corbridge, however, to demonstrate the basic structure of the mill, and to provide radiocarbon dates suggesting an Early Medieval date of construction, probably in the 8th to 9th centuries AD.

Three main elements are fortunately still present: three massive timber sleeper beams up to 8m (26ft) long, set at right angles to the flow of the river; three areas of heavy paving, of which the best preserved lies between two beams; and a row of stakes upstream from the main structure, thought to be part of a revetment for the mill-pond. All these lie on the same horizontal plane. The position of other beams, now missing, had been recorded previously, and a probable chute for directing a jet of water at the wheel itself has been located, dragged from its original position by the force of the river.

These fragmented remains may be interpreted in the light of the Tamworth mill. The main sleeper beams have large mortice-slots to hold the uprights for the upper chamber,

38  
Plan of water-mill  
discovered in the  
river Tyne by  
Corbridge  
(*Archaeology in  
Northumberland  
1998-1999*).



containing the mill-wheel and associated fittings. Other slots would have held the chute which directed water at the wheel, and openings for the escape of the water. The heavy paving would have been needed to support the wheel and its shaft. The presence of other beams and paving downstream from the more coherent structures may suggest that there had been one or more further mills in tandem down the river.

The other technical introduction mentioned above, the rotary mortar-mixer, is a far simpler device. Indeed, the first one to be discovered in Britain during excavations at Monkwearmouth in the 1960s was not recognized as such (Cramp 1969, fig.14, structure A). It was only after the discovery of five mortar-mixers during the excavation of the middle Saxon palaces at Northampton that the Monkwearmouth example came to be acknowledged (Williams, Shaw & Denham 1985, 21-6, 36-7). Recently another Northumbrian-type example was discovered at Dunbar (Perry 2000, 63-4).

These mortar-mixers are structurally simple devices: essentially a cylindrical pit, ranging in diameter from *c* 2.1m (7ft) (Dunbar) to 3.65m (12ft) (Monkwearmouth), and *c* 0.45m (1.5ft) deep. In the centre, a shaft or pivot is fixed in the bottom, to support a beam. This extends beyond the pit on both sides, and on its underside two or three paddles are set either side of the pivot to stir the mortar. Traditional reconstructions suggest that the beam was moved by manpower, but this appears to overlook the higher probability that oxen or asses would have been used.

Similar mixers are well known on the Continent, and are mostly assigned to the Carolingian and Ottonian periods, essentially the 9th and 10th centuries. In the case of the example from Dunbar, it is argued that this, and the associated stone hall (Building 8) predate the supposed burning of Dunbar (*concremauit Dunbarre*), during the reign of

Kenneth son of Alpin (840? - 858: MO Anderson 1990, 288; 1980, 250). The Monkwearmouth mixer was presumably in use during the original building of the monastery in the late 7th century (17.2.2). If this is accepted, then the introduction of such mixers to northern Britain may reasonably be attributed to the Gaulish masons, brought in by Benedict Biscop to build a stone church in the Roman manner.



To conclude this account of crafts and industry, it must be stressed that there is no published corpus of artefacts relevant to the region and period of this study. In default of such a resource, it has seemed appropriate to explore a wide, indeed eclectic, range of topics, but to illustrate them through a restricted number of examples. The overall objective has been to display the wide variety of crafts and technologies that were available, and the richness of their products.

## 8.3 THE BASIC RURAL ECONOMY

### 8.3.1 Fields, settlements and soils

Any account of the basic rural economy of northern Britain in the period AD 550-850 has to face a double contrast. On the one hand, in later periods—from the 12th century onwards—there are plentiful written records from both secular (especially royal) and religious (especially monastic) sources in both England and eastern Scotland to provide evidence of crops and domestic animals. As an example: AAM Duncan cites (1975, 322-4) oats, barley and rye in eastern Scotland south of the Tay; wheat was also mentioned, sometimes as an imported, rather than a local, crop. North of the Tay, however, oats and bere were the major crops. In preliterate centuries, however, and especially in the pre-Roman and Roman Iron age, there is abundant archaeological evidence for field-systems often associated with settlements, and sometimes with evidence for crops and animals (brief summary in Halliday 1993; essays and references in Chapman & Mytum 1983; Miket & Burgess 1984; Spratt & Burgess 1985; Foster & Smout 1994; and now most comprehensively, Edwards & Ralston 1997). This is especially the case either side of the modern Anglo-Scottish Border, though some settlements may really belong to the 5th or 6th centuries (eg Crock Cleuch: 16.4.1; illus 95 below).

Thereafter there are scattered reports of settlements discovered from the air or by excavation (discussed below, 16.5). But there appear to be no associated field systems. Indeed, essentially we are now in what has fittingly been called the 'hidden centuries' (Yeoman 1991).

If, in default of a corpus of evidence, we nonetheless wished to speculate more widely about settlement areas and associated fields, we should first consider the great variety of landscapes which occur in north Britain. These are the products of the varied geology—both solid and drift—as well as of altitude, aspect and climate (Morrison 1996). This physical variety obviously presented an equally great range of both opportunities and disadvantages for the farmer.

It has been argued above (3.2) that the most obvious factor was that of altitudinal range from sea-level upwards because this governed the possibilities for arable farming as against pastoralism. Except under very favourable circumstances, such as a sunny and

sheltered location, the upper limit for crop-growing may be placed at about 200m (650ft) above sea-level. An upper limit for the summer grazing of cattle, which was the commonest domesticated food-animal, would lie at about 600m (2000ft). These levels might be expected to rise and fall in response to climatic changes; but only when they were major ones, and none are recorded in the period of this study.

More difficult to establish is the quality of the soil in our period, especially in relation to the possibility of arable farming. Modern soils are a doubtful guide, because they will have suffered millennia of leaching, especially in upland areas of high rainfall. Moreover, they are likely to have undergone much alteration through human operations including draining, ploughing, over-cropping and manuring by dung and seaweed. Furthermore, it is now recognized that ancient ploughed soils may underlie centuries of subsequent peat-formation. For these, and other reasons summarized above (3.2), the value for Early Historic studies of any modern soil survey is seriously restricted.

One possible approach to the pre-Improvement potential for agriculture has already been suggested: namely the map traditionally known as the 'Roy Map', which was produced by a military survey between 1747 and 1755 (Royal Scottish Geographical Society 1973). The map was coloured, with cultivated land shown as yellow, and it thus presents us with the possibility of establishing the maximum extent of pre-Improvement arable. Regrettably, this major source for social history has been largely ignored. Indeed, the publication in full colour of the environs of Urquhart Castle seems to be the first use of the coloured map in relation to an archaeological site (Alcock, L & E A 1992; and col illus I.1 here).

### 8.3.2 Vegetation history

The manifest paucity of available information on fields and soils is partly compensated for by the study of vegetation-history, witnessed rather rarely by macro-fossils such as preserved timbers, leaves, nuts and fruits, and more commonly by micro-fossils, principally pollen. The study has traditionally been concerned with the spread and composition of vegetation, and especially shrubs and forest trees, since the last glaciation. Over the last four or five millennia in northern and western Europe there has been an especial interest, from the human or historical view-point, in anthropogenic deforestation as an indicator of the spread of agriculture—both as pastoralism and arable farming—and the demand for timber for building.

At this point a note of caution must be inserted, without any intention of depreciating the work of palynologists. A leading practitioner, Richard Tipping, has published a penetrating critique of the present state of knowledge of woodland history in Scotland, in particular in relation to the availability of dated sequences of vegetation development (Tipping 1994, espec 1-9). By 'dated sequences' radiocarbon dates are implied; but it has already been pointed out that the statistical character of such dates normally reduces their value in historical contexts. Tipping's paper shows that, from a total of nearly 250 sites, only 56 'feature more than one radiocarbon date on sediment younger than 3000 cal BC. This does not encourage the historical archaeologist to make any large use of palynological information in his syntheses.

In the present context, a large concern is with human food-resources, especially cultivated crops. As a proxy source of food we should also note the importance of oak trees, which yielded acorns on which pigs were fed in the autumn: the *Annals of Ulster* make

frequent reference to oak mast. Wild fruits were doubtless also gathered; but it is difficult to determine whether or not the occurrence of berries on living-sites was purely accidental.

### Evidence from archaeological sites: Buiston, Dundurn and Burghead

For the historian, the most interesting evidence is that derived from actual archaeological excavations. This is distinctly scanty within the time- and area-limits of this study, but three examples may be cited. By far the richest of these is the recent excavation on the waterlogged crannog at Buiston, Ayrshire (16.4 below), whose rich preservation of organic material has been referred to above, which stood at an altitude a little below 95m (310ft) in a shallow lake or swamp. Evidence for the local environment, especially the woodland, came not from fossil pollen but from the structural timbers of the crannog-platform as well as from buildings and enclosing fences raised on that platform. Minor contributions also came from wooden handles and other non-structural artefacts, as well as carbonized or waterlogged seeds and other vegetable fragments.

In general terms, the evidence was for a wide spectrum, including both dense and open woodland, damp pastures and rough grazing, heath and mires. But emphasis is placed on the total absence of arable land in the vicinity. Despite this, waterlogged—and more especially carbonized—remains witnessed the presence on site of barley, oats and wheat, as well as flax, a plant valuable for both oil and fibre. Barley, oats and flax have also been recorded from the Early Historic settlement at Easter Kinnear: Dickson 1997 (for the site see 16.4.3 below). As for the exploitation of local woodland at Buiston: in the various rebuildings of the crannog, both mature alder and oak were used for major structural timbers. Hazel was used to weave hurdle screens. Willow may have formed an understorey to the mature alders, and birch may have grown on the damp slopes around the loch (Crone 1998).

Another site with a quite unexpected waterlogged deposit is the craggy hilltop on which was founded the hierarchical fort of Dundurn, in upper Strathearn. Here was discovered a deep deposit which was rich in well-preserved vegetation remains. Pollen analysis showed that the slopes surrounding the fort were less wooded in the Early Historic period than they are today, though alder and hazel were more common. Oak, important as a source of mast as well as of building timber, was however represented. Pollen of *Plantago lanceolata*, the principal weed of cultivation, implies cereal cultivation in the valley bottom; and consistent with this, rare carbonized grains were found (Dickson & Brough 1989; also Fiche 3 in Alcock *et al* 1989). These were of both Hulled and Naked six-row barley, and also of oats, whether wild or cultivated. Macro-fossils revealed the gathering of hazel-nuts, raspberries and wild cherries. An unusual light was thrown on Early Historic hygiene by the presence of mosses, known on other sites for toilet purposes. Finally, large quantities of bracken had been gathered for thatching, bedding or flooring.

The third example, in this case a wholly dry site, is the great Pictish stronghold of Burghead (13.3). Samples of organic material, rich in pollen, were taken from immediately beneath the rampart of the upper enclosure (Edwards & Ralston 1978). They showed that 'the pollen certainly indicates an open grassy area which was perhaps utilised for domestic as well as grazing purposes' (*ibid*, 206). The pollen results present an interesting paradox with regard to the building of Burghead: great quantities of oak beams were used in the construction of the ramparts, but oak (*Quercus* sp) is absent from the pollen. Presumably large numbers of oak timbers had been rafted in from the

shores of the Moray Firth and the lower slopes of the Great Glen (for the pre-clearance distribution of oak, see Price 1983, Fig 5.8; and for references to oak as well as pine and birch in later centuries, Crawford 1995, 12).

The major source of evidence about the history of woodlands and—more directly to the point for the archaeologist and historian—human impact on vegetation is that of datable pollen sequences. Several episodes of anthropogenic deforestation and subsequent regeneration have been recognized in northern Britain in the late 1st millennium BC and the 1st millennium AD. In north-east England, from the river Tees to a little north of the Tyne, and between the Pennines and the coastal lowlands, pollen sequences show a range of dates for deforestation, beginning as early as the 2nd century BC. Only rarely are they as late as the Roman occupation, and any connection with a military need for timber has been decisively dismissed (Hanson & Macinnes 1981). Indeed, the most recent verdict is that ‘the impact [of the Roman Conquest] appears to have been very limited. The general picture remains one of broad continuity, not of disruption’ (Hanson 1997, 216).

In an Early Medieval context, by far the most interesting result of pollen analysis comes from Black Loch in the Ochil Hills, Fife. This is a small hill loch at about 90m (300ft) OD. In a lengthy sequence, pollen of barley was present in the later Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (1490 to 5 bc: all dates quoted as uncalibrated radiocarbon dates). There follows a period with no cereals and a general decline in farming from 5bc to 520 ad.

Thereafter there was a marked change between 520 and 965 ad. Woodland was sparse, and there was an open landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farming. Pollen of barley and wheat/oats were present, implying a diversified crop of cereals (Whittington & Edwards 1994, Table 1, p 61). This conforms well with the local archaeology. About two miles (3km) to the north of Black Loch was the multiple-ramparted fort of Clatchard Craig (Close-Brooks, 1986a), with its two earlier ramparts radiocarbon-dated to the 6th or 7th century AD, and reinforced in later centuries. The pollen analysis provides valuable evidence about the source of timber for rampart building as well as about food for the fort’s builders and inhabitants; and it is rightly regarded as complementary to the archaeological research (Whittington & Edwards 1994, 63).

### 8.3.3 Animals, domestic and wild

Turning now from forests and crops to animal husbandry: information about this—and also about eating habits—may be gleaned from animal bones recovered on excavated sites. In northern Britain, the largest quantity of evidence comes, in fact, from the Northern Isles, and is therefore irrelevant to this study. A partial picture may, however, be obtained from recent publications of four diverse sites: the monastery of Iona (McCormick 1981, 313-8); the Dál Riata coastal fort of Dunollie (Jones & Hodgson 1987, 138 & *fiche*); the Pictish hierarchical fort of Dundurn deep in Strathearn (Driscoll 1989, 222 & *fiche*); and the so-called Roman Iron Age and Dark Age deposits at Edinburgh Castle (McCormick 1997). The evidence from animal bones may conveniently be tabulated (Table 4).

These statistics are not, as it happens, amenable to simple comparison. In the first place, the Dundurn and Dunollie figures are for percentages of identified fragments, whereas the Iona and Edinburgh Castle are for the minimum number of individual animals (MNI). Moreover, the Edinburgh figures are pooled from Phases 3 and 4: that is, those

	Cattle	Sheep/ ?Goat	Pig	Horse	Deer
<i>Dundurn</i>	61%	8%	31%		
<i>Dunollie</i>	64%	17%	19%		
<i>Iona</i>	33.3%	18.5%	7.4%	7.4%	
<i>Edinburgh</i>	28.2%	24.3%	25.2%	4.9%	8.7%

Table 4  
Animal bone  
percentages from  
Dundurn,  
Dunollie, Iona and  
Edinburgh Castle

designated Roman Iron Age and Dark Age.

In addition, when we consider the domestic livestock from the human point of view—that is, as food—at least three factors, not wholly quantifiable, must be taken into account. Firstly, relative carcass weight: that of cattle is broadly 12 times that of sheep; that of pigs would vary greatly as between piglets and mature boars. Secondly, a breeding cow or ewe would only drop a single offspring each year, whereas a sow would produce several litters each of five or more. Thirdly, it should be noted that pigs are likely to be under-represented in the record because their bones are particularly subject to attrition.

Some further comments on details may be offered. The Dundurn sheep/goats are described as short and stocky; they would certainly have little flesh as compared with modern improved breeds. They may have been kept for milk or wool. Those at Dunollie had mostly been killed before 18 months. At Dundurn, although some piglets were noted, most of the pigs were mature: but it is recognised that immature animals were probably under-represented because of bone attrition.

In all three samples, cattle predominated in simple terms of carcass weight. This pattern can be replicated in the Northern Isles as well as in Anglo-Saxon England and Ireland. Given the scarcity of grazing land on Iona, it may be suggested that some at least of the cattle had been swum across the Sound of Iona from Mull, a distance of about 1300m (1400yds).

In Ireland, much emphasis has been placed on the concept of a dairying regime, rather than a beef-raising one (McCormick 1983). Certainly, dairy products—milk, butter, cheeses and curds—appear to have been important in the Irish diet; and the bones from excavated sites suggests the slaughter of immature males, so that most cattle over two or three years old were cows. No similar evidence appears to be available from northern Britain.

There is, however, a reason other than diet for the killing of immature calves regardless of sex (which cannot be determined from immature bones). The original Dunollie report refers to 'a calf or late embryo, which may have been slaughtered to make vellum or fine-quality leather' (Alcock, L & E A 1987, fiche 2:F5). This is a reminder that all written works—psalters, gospels, saints' lives, other writings whether religious or secular—required the slaughter of calves. An estimate for the Book of Kells (20.3.3; 20.5.1) is 185 calves, from a herd of 1200 or more cattle (Meehan 1994). The most striking example is provided by the three pandects, or complete bibles, written in Ceolfriht's monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow in the early 8th century. These required 'the skins of some 1,550 calves, implying the existence of great herds of cattle' in Northumbria

(Bruce-Mitford 1967, 2).

Apart from the utilitarian importance of cattle for food and book-production, they had great non-utilitarian or symbolic significance (Lucas 1989 for major study). In Ireland, the size of a herd was a visible marker of the importance of an individual. It was important too in establishing and maintaining relationships between lords and their clients (Gerriets 1983). Although the major evidence comes from Ireland, it is very probable that similar socio-economic practices were normal among the Dál Riata Scots; widespread among the Celtic peoples including the northern Britons; and perhaps also among the Picts. The major social importance of cattle, however, was as the objective for cattle raids: the leading adventure sport and training ground for warfare.

Turning now to wild animals: evidence for these was negligible at Dundurn and Dunollie, consisting only of the odd red deer bone or antler. By contrast, wild species comprised about one third of the Iona sample. The commonest were deer: red deer forming 14.8%, and roe 3.7%. It is suggested that these had been hunted on Mull. At Edinburgh Castle, red deer constituted nearly 9% of the MNI totals. There is a general belief that the modern red deer of the moors and mountains of northern Britain have decreased in size as a result of the loss of their natural woodland environment, and that the larger deer of the Early Historic period could have made a very important contribution to the meat supply (McCormick 1981, 317; but for a more cautious statement, see Noddle 1982).

Another important addition to the Iona diet was the grey seal, at 7.4% of the total. The carcass weight of a bull seal is in the same range as that of cattle. It appears that the monastery claimed rights over the seals breeding in the surrounding seas. Adomnán relates an incident when Columba ordered the seizure of a thief who was poaching seals off Mull, described as *marini nostri iuris vituli*, 'the sea-cattle which are ours by right' (VC i, 41, 42a)

Another marine mammal present among the Iona bones was an otter, which had probably been trapped for its valuable fur.

### 8.3.4 The bottom line

Despite the sparseness and even inconsistencies of the evidence for the basic economy of the Early Historic centuries in northern Britain, the bottom line is clear, and can be expressed in numerical terms. In addition to potentates, clerics and craftsmen, the economy was capable of maintaining a gross population of some tens of thousands, and of mounting military expeditions in terms of thousands.

The starting point for such calculations is the Dál Riata muster roll of the late 7th century, the *Senchus Fer nAlban* (5 above). From this it appears that the three kindred-groups of the kingdom of Dál Riata could raise a force of a little over 2000 men. We have no similar information about Northumbria, nor about the Picts or the northern Britons. But, in the earliest attempt (1755) to estimate the population of Scotland, the rule-of-thumb proposed was that a military force should amount to only one fifth of the population as a whole (Webster, in Kyd 1952, 8-9). Such a calculation would suggest a gross population of 10,000 for Dál Riata.

With some reservations, this figure can be extended to Scotland as a whole. An attempt

to establish the wealth of the individual dioceses of Scotland in the 14th century shows that the overall wealth of the country was 18 times that of the diocese of Argyll (Cooper 1947). There is no reason to suppose that the proportionate distribution of wealth was significantly different between the 7th and the 14th centuries. If, then, the figure for the population of Dál Riata is multiplied by 18, then the total population might be calculated as 180,000: perhaps the bracket 150,000 - 200,000 would be more acceptable. For Pictland, on the same basis, a figure of 80,000 - 100,000 might be projected (Alcock 1997). This assessment is certainly more soundly based than the previously canvassed one of 40,000 for the Picts (Thomas 1963).







I.3  
Sueno's Stone,  
Forres, Moray: the  
pictorial face of the  
great cross-slab  
(viewed before  
erection of the  
present glass  
shelter)  
(*Historic Scotland*)



I.4  
Broninis, 'Breast Island',  
Lindisfarne  
(*Photo: Mick Sharp*)



I.5  
A hilltop  
inauguration place:  
the rock-carved  
footprint at  
Dunadd, Argyll  
(*Historic Scotland*)

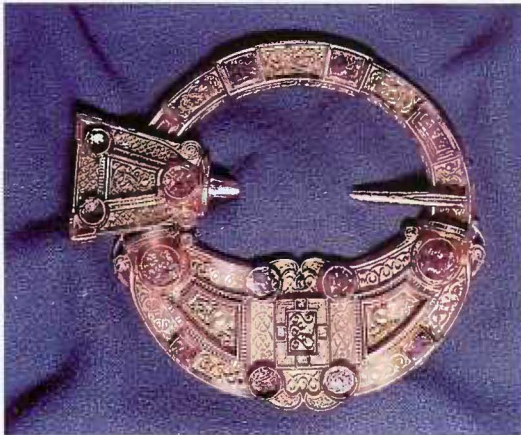
I.6  
Eagle-headed  
mounts from lyres:  
above, Taplow;  
below, Sutton Hoo  
(*British Museum*)





I.7 (above and above right)  
Escutcheons from the Sutton Hoo  
great hanging-bowl illustrating enamel-  
and millefiori-work  
(*British Museum*)

I.8  
Hunterston, Ayrshire, masterpiece  
of the metalworker's art, the great  
pseudo-penannular brooch  
(*National Museums of Scotland*)



I.9  
St Cuthbert's  
pectoral cross  
(*Durham Cathedral Library*)



## PART THREE

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### WARFARE

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Warfare was a major—perhaps *the* major—activity of kings and nobles in the Heroic Age of northern Britain. War also provided the major mechanism in the political adjustments which had been made necessary by the intrusion of two new nations or peoples—the Angles, and the Irish/Scots—into the existing ethnic and linguistic composition of Northern Britain.

Warfare was commemorated in prose and verse, though only very rarely in carved stone. The resources of the four peoples or nations, in manpower, land, and other wealth, were organized in its service. In the eyes of a major contemporary, Bede, there was strong interaction between warfare and religion. Hunting was a capital preparation for it; and so, in the bards' eyes, were feasting and drinking in the king's hall. Indeed, there were few aspects of society which were not touched by it.

The first chapter of this section looks at the occasions and motivations for war. It examines different types of warfare and their justification. Subsequent chapters look in detail at individual campaigns and battles, at the likely size and constituents of the armies of the four peoples—Picts, Dál Riata, Britons and Angles—and at the weaponry and strongholds of the period.



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## OCCASIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF WAR

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### 9.1 OCCASIONS OF WAR: HOSTINGS

**K**ings initiated wars, and annual trans-border hostings, and seized booty. That was the behaviour expected of them, and the origins of such practices, like the origins of kingship itself, are lost in prehistory.

In Ireland—and, as we shall see, in Dál Riata too—part of the inaugural rituals for a king required him to demonstrate his fitness for office by carrying out a cattle raid on a neighbouring kingdom. Apart from the symbolic act of displaying military valour, the raid provided the new king with a store of cattle for feasting his followers. This activity, known back at least to the 7th century AD, was sufficiently institutionalized as to have its own name, *crech rig* or ‘regal prey’ (O’Riain 1974; note that the term does not appear in Kelly 1988).

The evidence for the ‘regal prey’ in Dál Riata is in itself an interesting example of the inertia of history in a society largely guided by custom. At the beginning of the 18th century, in his account of the ‘Antient and Modern Customs... of the Western Islands’, Martin Martin (1716) recorded that, before being accepted as a leader, ‘every...young Chieftain of a tribe was obliged... to give a publick specimen of his valour... by making a desperate incursion upon some neighbour...[and] to bring back by open force the cattel they found... or to die in the attempt’. In this, the chief was ‘attended with a retinue of young men of quality’, but without previous military reputation, ‘and ambitious of such an opportunity to signalize themselves’.

Martin implies that the practice had actually died out at least 60 years previously. He adds the percipient comment that ‘This custom being reciprocally used...the damage which one tribe sustained...was repaired when their Chieftain came in his turn to make his specimen’ (Martin 1716, 101-2). In other words: in economic terms, predation is a totally unproductive activity, which merely moves to and fro the fruits of other peoples’ labour. (It should be emphasised that such cattle raids were not at all comparable, whether in their military or socio-political aspects, with the reiving activities on the Anglo-Scottish border, which reached their climax in the 16th century).

After fulfilling this inaugural expectation, there appear to have been rules which determined the king’s entitlement to hostings. These are best known in medieval Welsh law-tracts, but it may reasonably be expected that similar customs applied among the Britons of the ‘Old North’: Gododdin, Strathclyde and Rheged. Moreover, Dumville has suggested (1981) that ‘in so far as [the Pictish language] was Celtic, it was related to Brittonic. Up to a point, the same may therefore be true of social organisation’. He then uses the law-tracts to illuminate 7th-century social organisation among the Picts,

and by implication, among the northern Britons as well.

This approach is followed here. In using the Welsh law-tracts to provide important evidence on the subject of hostings, it must be admitted that the earliest known texts are of the 13th century. A recent editor has stated, however, that 'the ultimate foundation...is a small core of material put together about the middle of the 10th century' (Jenkins, 1986, xi). Beyond this, it may be suggested that some elements in that early core appear to represent a very primitive social structure which had been preserved by the inertia of history. What we have seen to be the case with the long survival of the Irish and Scottish expectation of an inaugural hosting may likewise be expected for hostings in general.

On these the Welsh law-tracts are clear: 'the king is not entitled to have from his country any hostings outside its limits save once in a year, and he is not entitled to be in that save for a fortnight and a month. In his own country it is free for him when he likes' (Jenkins 1986, 124; cf *ibid*, 41). Irish practice seems to have been more liberal, for the king might at any time summon the freemen for a *slógad* (hosting) not only to repel invaders, but also to attack a neighbouring *tuath* or petty kingdom (Kelly 1988, 40).

There is a striking discrepancy between the frequency of warfare implied by the law-tracts of the Irish and Welsh, and that deduced for the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Arnold 1980, fig. 4.1). This has nothing to do with different levels of bellicosity as between the Celtic and Germanic nations. It is indeed an artefact created by the use of different types of evidence. This can be demonstrated by examining the Irish and Welsh annals, which take no account of annual hostings, and record only major battles, especially those in which potentates were killed. It may indeed be that, among the Anglo-Saxons, there was no general custom of annual hostings; but it would be very remarkable if the Mercians and Northumbrians had not adopted it in retaliation against their Celtic neighbours. If they had done so, however, then on the analogy of the Irish and Welsh annals, we would not expect to find such hostings registered in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, still less in the pages of Bede or Stephen.

One useful outcome of the annual hosting was that it provided battle training, and more importantly, battle experience, for new recruits, who were probably no more than 14 or 15 years old. No doubt the pursuit of hunting would have given them some training in horsemanship and, so far as weapon handling was concerned, in spear-throwing as well. But far more necessary was the battle-hardening—of both men and horses—against the sights, sounds and smells of battle: the harsh challenges of the enemy, the whinnying and screams of wounded animals and men, the smell of blood and ordure.

Such battle-hardening was the more necessary because the expectation of a bloody outcome of battle must have been high. This we may deduce at least from narratives like that of Bede, or records of the death of kings. Intermittent though the relevant notices are, the slaying of a personal warband, or even of an entire army was not uncommon. We must assume that the individual warrior comforted himself, as soldiers have certainly done in more recent times, with the belief that death might come to the next man, but not to him.

## 9.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR WAR

### 9.2.1 Plunder, prisoners and hostages

Given the royal prerogative of a hosting outside the kingdom, what gains or profits might be expected? Foremost would have been the hope of plunder, possibly represented as the taking of a legitimate tribute from a neighbouring people, who were regarded as subjects. This is well seen in the relations of Northumbria with the Picts, who did not see themselves as subjects, and who therefore were regarded as rebellious when they refused such impositions. Similar problems arose on the frontiers of the Merovingian and Carolingian realms.

While tribute or plunder might involve any movable goods, the most convenient was, of course, that which could move itself: cattle and horses. The taking of prisoners, whether for their ransom, or for sale as slaves, might also be the result of a successful battle. On the other hand, raiding for slaves as such seems to have been relatively uncommon—though not unknown—before the great raids of the Vikings, especially Hiberno-Norse raiders like Olaf and Ivarr.

The taking of royal or noble hostages was quite another matter, because it had important implications for a king's prestige, and for his ability to control, or at least influence, relations with his neighbours. As for prestige, the Irish Laws asserted that 'he is not a king who does not have hostages in fetters' (Kelly 1988, 173-4). This recalls the binding in chains of the two sons of Selbach of Dál Riata by the Pictish king Oengus, son of Fergus, an act which demonstrates that the practice was observed among the Picts as well as among the Irish.

It is significant that Oengus's hostages were of royal blood, for in Ireland hostages were normally the sons of kings or nobles. Among persons of rank who were put in chains by the Northumbrians and Mercians were the contumacious bishop (in King Ecgrith's eyes!) Wilfrid (*VW*, 38), and the nobleman Imma (*HE* iv, 22). Another was supposedly the British bard Aneirin (*YG*, stanza 49; commentary by Jarman 1988, xxvi-xxvii). Aneirin's description of his prison, 'beneath the feet of hairy slugs...in an earthy dwelling, an iron chain around my knees', immediately suggests that he was held in a typical Anglo-Saxon sunken-floored building.

Although the prestige-value of hostages should not be underestimated in a heroic society, there were obvious material advantages as well. The action of Oengus in seizing two royal personages was a major move in asserting his lordship over Dál Riata. It was a powerful means of ensuring the payment of tribute from neighbours either reluctant to acknowledge overlordship, or rebellious against it. Kelly records that in Ireland, 'if the authority of the overking was flouted, the hostages were forfeit, and they might be killed, blinded, or ransomed' (Kelly 1988, 174).

The taking of hostages might also be a means of guaranteeing the neutrality of one neighbour as a prelude to a major campaign against another. This at least would be a rational reason for an act which Bede found incomprehensible: Ecgrith's raid in Ireland in AD 684, in which prisoners were taken. These may have been hostages for Irish neutrality in the 685 campaign against the Picts which ended at Nechtansmere (10.1.2 below).

### 9.2.2 Vengeance and blood-feuds

Another powerful motive for war was the pursuit of vengeance for the death of members of one's own nation, and especially of one's own kin: the motive formalised as the blood-feud. In opposition, however, to the continuous, self-promoting warfare inspired by blood-vengeance, stood the concept of money compensation for the spilling of blood: blood-price instead of blood-feud. The blood-price was a concept deeply grounded in the traditional or customary law of both Germanic and Celtic peoples, to such an extent that it is not easy to find references to blood-feud. For instance, the earliest Anglo-Saxon laws to be committed to writing, those of Æthelbert of Kent (c AD 602-603; *EHD*, 391-4), include a lengthy tariff of compensation for homicides and other acts of violence.

In the Welsh Laws, the emphasis was likewise on the payment of compensation for homicide (Jenkins 1986, xxx). Indeed, 'there are no recorded instances of feud in the pre- (Norman) Conquest period: the principle of compensation appears to have been accepted rather than killing in return' (Davies 1982, 80). In the Irish Laws, however, clear arrangements are made for the responsibility for pursuing a blood-feud (eg Kelly 1988, 15, 31, 127), especially in relation to the obligations of kinsmen and clients to kin and overlords. These obligations arise, however, only after the failure of the guilty party to pay compensation.

Altogether, in an Insular context it may seem difficult to find evidence to support the claim that the pursuit of blood-feud was a major cause of war. Bede, however, provides a striking example to the contrary at both national and personal levels. In AD 679, in a battle between Mercia and Northumbria, Ælwine, son of king Ecgrith was killed. In Bede's view, it might have been expected that this would have led to further and fiercer fighting between the two kings and their fierce peoples. However, the intervention of Archbishop Theodore led to the restoration of peace. One of the principal terms was that Ecgrith accepted the obligatory money payment (*debita...multa pecuniae*) instead of pursuing blood-vengeance (*HE* iv, 21).

This was at the level of kings and peoples; but arising from the same battle, Bede also relates the individual miracle-story of the noble Imma (*HE* iv, 22; fuller account 10.7 below). In this, the Mercian noble who had captured Imma tells him that he deserves to die, in revenge for the deaths of all the brothers and kinsmen of the Mercian. It would be difficult to imagine a plainer case of the right to blood vengeance. Since Bede emphasises that he received the story at only one remove from Imma himself, we may reasonably believe it.

Taken together, these two chapters of Bede's History show us that there was a customary expectation that bloodshed would be compensated by a money payment. However, running counter to this there was a very human demand for blood vengeance. It also shows that the influence of the Church was strongly in favour of money compensation for violence, including homicide. It is scarcely necessary to add that amid the actual battlefield emotions of fear and exhilaration, the moderating influence of the Church would have been non-existent.

There is, however, a certain air of unreality about the legal texts and some modern commentaries on them. Under what circumstances might money payment be expected for a homicide? Surely Northumbrian kings could not expect money compensation for the slaughter at Nechtansmere? In the case of the conflict between Ecgrith of

Northumbria and Æthelred of Mercia, did Theodore arrange a two-way exchange of blood-payments between the two kingdoms? If blood was shed in the course of an annual hosting, was compensation paid? If so, then throughout Britain and Ireland a lot of money must have changed hands every year! These are not questions which are normally asked, essentially because historians have shied away from the realities of Early Medieval warfare.

### 9.2.3 Territorial expansion

Turning to other motives for war: at a political level, there was the desire of kings for territorial expansion and the extension of overlordship over neighbouring peoples and kingdoms. We see this very clearly in Bede's account of Edwin's alleged attainment of dominion over the whole of Britain, including not only the English kingdoms, but the British ones as well, and even the islands of Anglesey and Man. At this point, Bede is writing from hearsay about events half a century before his birth. Moreover, there is a strong religious element here, for we are told that Edwin's political power had increased as a divine sign that he would become a Christian believer.

Likewise Bede's report that Oswiu exercised overlordship over the southern English kingdoms, as well as the greater part of the Picts (*HE* iii, 24), must be accepted with reserve. On the other hand, his account of the loss of Northumbrian dominion over the Picts, the Scots, and some of the Britons after Ecgfrith's death at Nechtansmere was certainly within his personal knowledge (*HE* iv, 26). Acceptance of this may go some way towards validating his earlier statements.

## 9.3 WAR BY LAYING WASTE

The most obvious means of extending dominion over neighbouring kingdoms was, of course, by inflicting a signal defeat over their army, at the same time slaying the king, other members of the royal family, and other nobles. Another was through the operation referred to by the verb *vastare*, or the noun *vastatio*; perhaps best translated as ravaging or 'rapine'. We have already seen an instance of this in the case of Oengus, son of Fergus in AD 736: *Oengus...vastavit regiones Dail Riatai*. What we do not know is how destructive such rapine was of lives (whether human or animal), property and cultivation.

The philosopher Hobbes does indeed quote reasons and precedents for limiting the level of destruction (Hobbes 1640, xix 1); but historical examples must qualify these. We may recall the wholesale medieval destruction of cities and communities by Central Asian hordes; or the centuries-old Balkan conflicts between Turk and Slav. Closer in space and time, the Norman 'Harrying of the North' appears to have been aimed at the total destruction of the capacity of the peasants to produce food or even maintain life. A key element in the policy was the destruction not merely of existing crops, but of the ploughs needed to produce the next season's harvest. But the object of such savagery directed at the primary producers was to reduce a rebellious nobility to submission to Norman overlordship (Kapelle 1979).

Unfortunately, our information about the degree of devastation in the period of this study is based on the hearsay evidence of Bede. Early in his account of the English settlement, he praises Æthelfrith of Northumbria (ruled AD 592-617) for his pre-eminence

in conquering or settling land, 'after exterminating or subjecting the natives', that is, the Britons (*HE* i, 34). Bede reports that in his wars against Northumbria, Penda was determined to wipe out the whole people of that land, from the least to the greatest (*HE* iii, 24). With neighbours like these, it is not surprising that the British king Cadwallon should have decided to wipe out the whole nation of the English from Britain (*HE* ii, 20).

We have no means of estimating the actual severity of these ravagings. Indeed, we may feel some degree of scepticism when Æthelfrith is compared with two heroic warriors of the Old Testament (*HE* i, 34): king Saul, and Benjamin, of whom it was prophesied that he 'shall ravine as a wolf' (Genesis, 49:27). We see here a typical instance of Bede's unrelenting hostility to the Britons. It is evident that his animus against Penda was as great.

The available written reports give us no firm basis for assessing the true level of destruction wrought by these acts of devastation. Our ignorance is compounded because of the difficulty of estimating the speed of subsequent recovery. Only in one case, the sequel to Cadwallon's ravaging and ultimate overthrow by Oswald, may we infer that recovery may have been speedy. Bede reports that as soon as Oswald became king, he sent to the Irish—meaning by this the Scots of Dál Riata—for a bishop to preach in Northumbria. In response Aidan was sent from Iona (*HE* iii, 4).

So successful was Aidan's mission that churches were built in various places, and the king himself gave estates and other property for the founding of monasteries. That this burgeoning of Christianity is set within Oswald's brief reign of eight years suggests that Bernicia at least had not suffered greatly at Cadwallon's hands. Moreover, we may place greater reliance on Bede's report here than in some instances, simply because the founding of churches and monasteries is very likely to have been recorded in contemporary writings and inscriptions.

## 9.4 RECRUITMENT, VOLUNTARY AND ENFORCED

The institutional or enforceable mechanisms by which armies might be recruited will be examined fully in chapter 11. But it must also be recognized that there were personal, subjective motives which attracted men to create or to join a royal warband.

One of the most telling contemporary accounts is that in Chapter XVI of Felix's *Life of St Guthlac* (*VG*). Having extolled the exemplary childhood of Guthlac, son of a distinguished Mercian, his biographer continues: 'when his youthful strength had increased, and a noble desire for command burned in his young breast, he remembered the valiant deeds of heroes of old, and...changed his disposition; and gathering bands of followers took up arms'. He thereby 'amassed immense booty' (*VG*, chap XVII).

This extract combines the subjective motive—emulation of the heroes of old—with the expectation of material rewards. If we were to judge by *Y Gododdin* alone, we might believe that the main incentive was literally a year's supply of free mead and wine. If, however, we might accept that a warrior was attracted by the same promise of rewards as a bard, then we may turn to Taliesin, whose expectations are set out clearly, even if in inflated terms (eg *PT* 1). He expected weapons, especially with jewelled scabbards; rich cloaks; personal jewellery, with both arm rings and brooches being specifically

mentioned; and richly caparisoned horses. Except for the weapons and cloak, silver is the dominant theme.

All this has a very materialistic flavour, and presents a picture of a warband that was mercenary in the worst sense of the term. But the essence of the Heroic Age was that men joined the warband of a famous king—that is, a militarily-successful one—in the pursuit of personal fame. And beyond that there were other non-material incentives, which modern revisionist historians might deny. Foremost among these was the excitement of going out on a hosting; an excitement not wholly divorced from bloodlust, which is never far below the surface of the poetry of Aneirin and Taliesin.

Another element in the excitement of a hosting would have been the keen pleasure of exhibiting one's skills, initially in horsemanship, and then, as battle was joined, in weaponcraft. With this is compounded the special pleasure of being a member of an elite. This is the spirit which, in a modern context, can readily be found in the writings of ace fighter-pilots such as Cecil Lewis (Lewis 1936 and subsequent editions). It is a spirit further inspired by the possession of a particularly efficient weapon, well expressed in the Peninsular War recollections of Rifleman Harris (Hibbert 1970).

These incentives, both material and mental, would have been sufficient for the voluntary gathering of the warbands of Heroic society; but they would hardly seem adequate for recruiting the armies required by nations organised for war, such as Mercia, Northumbria, Dál Riata and other less well-documented kingdoms seem to have been. If the case argued in Chapter 11 for armies combining both horse and foot is accepted, then it would seem that some kind of enforceable muster would be essential, at least for the foot-soldiers.

For this, the best evidence is provided by the Dál Riata muster for both land and sea warfare set out in the *Senchus Fer nAlban*, and outlined below (11.1.2; 11.2.1). The basis of this was the *tech* or statutory household, presumably a landholding unit. These were grouped hierarchically into larger units of septs and 'tribes'. We have no direct evidence of a comparable system in Northumbria (still less among the Britons and Picts). But it is significant that Bede uses the term *familia...iuxta aestimationem Anglorum* as a unit of land assessment in Dál Riata Iona (*HE* iii, 4). It is not unreasonable to suggest that Bede had received his information directly from Iona, and that he was responsible for equating the *tech* with the *familia*.

Bede also uses the *familia* unit in describing the islands of Anglesey and Man after they had been brought under the overlordship of Edwin (*HE* ii, 9). Modern historians, writing of Anglo-Saxon social arrangements, regularly translate *familia* or more fully *terra unius familiae* as 'hide', and gloss it as a holding of land 'which ideally provided for the peasant household' (eg Loyn 1991, 166). It must be stressed that the peasant householder was a free-born yeoman farmer, with legally defined military responsibilities (*Laws of Ine*, c AD 690: *EHD*, 398–407). In this respect, the English system of legal assessment in terms of hides may have served as a basis for military musters.

In clause 51 of Ine's code there are definite penalties for the neglect of military service: a noble landholder would forfeit his land and be fined 120 shillings; a landless noble, 60 shillings; and a free peasant (*ceorl*) would be fined 30 shillings. Incidentally, this tariff demonstrates the relatively high status of the free peasant in Anglo-Saxon society.

Fines apart, what motivation might the common soldiers—that is to say, those not of the royal warband—have had? In the first place, there would have been the personal loyalty to an immediate leader or chief. In the *Senchus Fer nAlban*, the section devoted to the kindred of Lorn names the leaders of individual septs, and then allots to each a certain number of ‘houses’, the basic unit for both land and naval musters. We may see here the embryo of the later clan system. In Ireland, Kelly suggests that when the king organises a hosting against a neighbouring kingdom (*tuath*), ‘it is likely that each lord acts as commander of his own clients in battle’. Again, in early Northumbria, as well as in the rest of Anglo-Saxon England, Abels has argued that the *ceorls*, or common soldiers, were followers of the *gesiths* or nobles in battle (Abels 1988).

Apart from the positive motive of loyalty to a lord, it is reasonable to imagine that there was also a powerful negative motivation: that is to say, enmity towards neighbouring peoples and kingdoms. The psychological need to strengthen a sense of belonging to one’s own group by defining its difference from its neighbours is well known. Even today, enmities between English/Scot, north/south Wales, Lancashire/Yorkshire, Highlander/Lowlander are present, though for the most part they only rise to a violent level in a football stadium. In earlier times, such enmities would have been further inflamed by recollections of previous victories or defeats, as well as the slaying of one’s kinsmen.

## 9.5 LIMITATIONS ON WAR

### 9.5.1 Christian attitudes to war

If we first consider conceptual or ideological limitations on the occasions and conduct of war, it must be stressed immediately that Christian teaching in the period can hardly be regarded as a major force against warfare. In particular, the enthusiasm of the two major Christian writers, Bede and Stephen, for Old Testament models, was a positive encouragement to kings to be warlike (on Bede, see McClure 1983). One example, typical of many, was Stephen’s praise of the recently enthroned Ecgrith acting ‘like Judas Maccabeus’ in pursuit of the rebellious Picts (*VW*, 19). Even before the late 7th century, however, the kings of the Heroic Age must have regarded the warrior kings of the Old Testament as admirable role-models, with the added sanction of being divinely ordained.

At the same time, Christian leaders were developing a concept of the just war, based ultimately on the authors of Classical Antiquity and the Early Fathers. Bede strongly condemned Ecgrith’s aggression of AD 684 against innocent civilians and clergy in Ireland (*HE* iv, 26). On the other hand, he was a warm supporter of war in defence of the kingdom and people of Northumbria. Shortly before his death he wrote in strong terms to Bishop Egbert, condemning (in addition to many flagrantly immoral practices) the loss of nobles who ought to defend the nation against barbarians. Also in the 8th century, a synod at which Boniface, ‘apostle of Germany’, was present decreed that ‘a portion of the properties of the church...shall be used...for the benefit of the army’.

There was, however, a dissenting Christian view which held that man-slaying, even in the course of a justified war, demanded penance. In a 7th-century Insular context, this is expressed by Archbishop Theodore, who required that the slayer should keep away from the church for 40 days. (For these two paragraphs, see Cross 1971).

### 9.5.2 Treaties and negotiations

Another possible limitation on self-perpetuating warfare is referred to occasionally: negotiations for a treaty, backed by an exchange of hostages. An example of this is related in Taliesin's poem on the battle of Argoed Llwyfain. In this, the Anglian leader, nicknamed 'Fflamddwyn', the Flamebearer, may perhaps be identified with the late 6th-century Bernician king, Theoderic or Deodric. In the poem he is portrayed as an arrogant blusterer, demanding hostages from the Britons (accessible translation in Jarman 1992a, 60. See also Morris-Jones 1918; Williams & Williams 1968).

Fflamddwyn is met with the defiant response, firstly, that anyone descended from Coel would be in dire straits before he gave a hostage to another country; and secondly, that if the Angles wanted a treaty, they would be met by force of arms: 'let us slaughter Fflamddwyn and all his host'. This is wholly in keeping with the poetic ethos of Heroic warfare. In the *Canu Urien* poems, we read 'Fierce Unhwch...used to instruct me: "It is better to kill than to supplicate"' (Rowlands 1990, 477).

This seems to be far removed from any attempt to limit warfare. But in a historical, as opposed to a poetic context, Fflamddwyn's demand for hostages might be seen quite differently. According to the *Historia Brittonum*, Theoderic had defended the Bernician foothold centred on Lindisfarne (and presumably Bamburgh) against a coalition of four British kings (*HB*, 63). To consolidate his success, and put an end to hostilities, he may have proposed a treaty, which would necessarily have involved an exchange of hostages as guarantors for the maintenance of peace by both parties. In the spirit of Heroic warfare, this was rejected on the British side; and Theoderic/Fflamddwyn was then cast in the role of the blustering aggressor. It may be thought, however, that the *Historia Brittonum* is a poor basis for such quasi-historical speculation.

The rejection of proffered negotiations or treaties may not all have been on one side. A poem in praise of Cadwallon suggests that Edwin had dismissed such an offer at the start of Cadwallon's great ravaging campaign (Gruffydd 1978, 29, ll 24-6)

The Irish law-tracts also contain various references to a king's right to make treaties with neighbouring kingdoms (*tuatha*), which are then binding on his own people. It appears, however, that they are mostly concerned with minor or personal inter-kingdom acts of violence at a lesser level than that of warfare (Kelly 1988, 5, 127, 148).

The most striking instance of peace obtained by treaty is recorded at the very end of the *Ecclesiastical History* (*HE* v, 22), where Bede summarizes the present state of the English people and the whole of Britain. He records that at the time, that is AD 731, the nation of the Picts had a peace-treaty (*foedus pacis*) with the English people, and rejoiced to share in the Catholic peace and truth of the Church Universal.

Bede does not say how this treaty was brought about. We may speculate that its roots lay in the good relations established in the years AD 710 x 716 between the Pictish king Nechtan, son of Derile, and Ceolfrith, abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow (*HE* v, 20). By AD 731, however, the Picts had a new overlord, Oengus, son of Fergus, who in 729 had defeated Nechtan. The death of Oengus is recorded in 761 by one of the continuators of the *Ecclesiastical History* (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, 576-7), and his reign is there epitomised as that of a blood-stained slaughterer. Certainly he was an outstanding warrior-king among both the Scots and his fellow Picts, but not, it would appear, against

the Northumbrians. We may further speculate that the treaty mentioned by Bede was maintained in order to protect the Firth of Forth flank of the Picts.

Another, rarely recorded, method of avoiding war was by the offer of a bribe or ransom to the aggressor. Bede reports that Oswiu, faced with relentless attacks from Mercia, found himself forced to offer a large treasure if Penda would return to his own kingdom and cease his devastations. Penda, however, refused the offer and declared his intention of wiping out the whole nation. At this point, Oswiu sought divine support by offering his infant daughter as a consecrated virgin, as well as 12 estates for the founding of monasteries. He then attacked Penda, in a manner typical of Christian hero-kings—that is to say, with reputedly vastly inferior forces. Equally typical, he won an overwhelming victory, in which Penda himself was slain, together with a large number of his battle-leaders and those of his allies (*HE* iii, 24).

The most important attempt to limit the savagery of Heroic warfare, at least in relation to women, children, and the clergy, was the so-called ‘Law of the Innocents’. This was promulgated at the instigation of Adomnán of Iona, at a great gathering of both secular and religious potentates at Birr in Co Offaly in AD 697. The texts which have come down to us are late, and have various accretions, including a score of introductory chapters which appear to have been drawn from the prehistory of pagan Celtic mythology (Meyer 1905). If, however, we can believe the nominal roll of those present (or perhaps merely represented) at Birr, it includes (in addition to a large number of Irish), the Pictish bishop Curetan of Rosemarkie, the Pictish king Bridei, son of Derile, Eochaid, son of the Dál Riata king Domangart, and the saintly and influential English bishop, Ecgbert.

The Law itself (Meyer 1905, paragraphs 34–53) was to be ‘a perpetual law on behalf of clerics and women and innocent children until they are capable of slaying a man’ (that is to say, about age 14). To achieve this, it established a scale of penalties for acts of homicide and lesser violence, very much on the pattern of the secular laws which were current, so far as the evidence goes, throughout Ireland and Britain. The fines were occasionally quoted in terms of bullion (for instance an ounce of silver), but most frequently in units known as a *cumal*, the value of a female slave.

If we accept the credibility of the list of those attending the synod at Birr, then we must have the greatest admiration for Adomnán’s skilled diplomacy in bringing together potentates from Northern Britain and Ireland (Smyth 1984, 133–5). In its resemblance to existing secular laws with their emphasis on blood-payment rather than blood-feud, however, its main innovatory feature is its specific emphasis on non-combatants—the innocents. In invoking the sanctions of the Church, it recalls the actions of Archbishop Theodore after the great battle between Æthelred of the Mercians and Ecgfrith of Northumbria in AD 679. How far the influence of the Church ‘may...have helped to change [the] warlike ethic of heroic society’ (Hughes 1966, 152) is a question beyond solution within the available evidence.

## 9.6 NAVAL ACTIVITY

During the late Roman period, the Anglo-Saxons, the Picts, and the Irish/Scots had all acquired evil reputations as raiders from the sea. It should therefore be no surprise that sea-raiding and naval warfare persisted in the post-Roman centuries, and was recorded

occasionally in the Irish Annals and other sources (general background: Marcus 1980; Haywood 1991).

It may have been from the sea, rather than overland from Deira, that the Angles obtained their first foothold in Bernicia by seizing the originally British strongholds at Bamburgh and Lindisfarne. Less than a century later, Edwin's establishment of English rule over the islands of Anglesey and Man was presumably achieved from harbours on the coasts of Lancashire and Cumbria. Moreover, one of the most infamous deeds related by Bede was the sea-borne ravaging of the 'harmless people' of Ireland by a Northumbrian army at the instigation of King Ecgrith in AD 684 (*HE* iv, 26).

Turning to the Scots of Dál Riata, one version of their ancestor-legend attributes their settlement of Argyll to a single generation: 'three times fifty men passed over in the fleet with the sons of Erc'. This may account for the migration of a dynasty; but the folk-settlement of western Scotland, demonstrated by the occurrence of Goidelic place-names, must have been a long drawn-out process. This would have been at the expense of the Picts in Argyll, and the Britons in the Rhinns of Galloway. Sea-contact between Britain and Ireland was maintained thereafter, especially by men of religion.

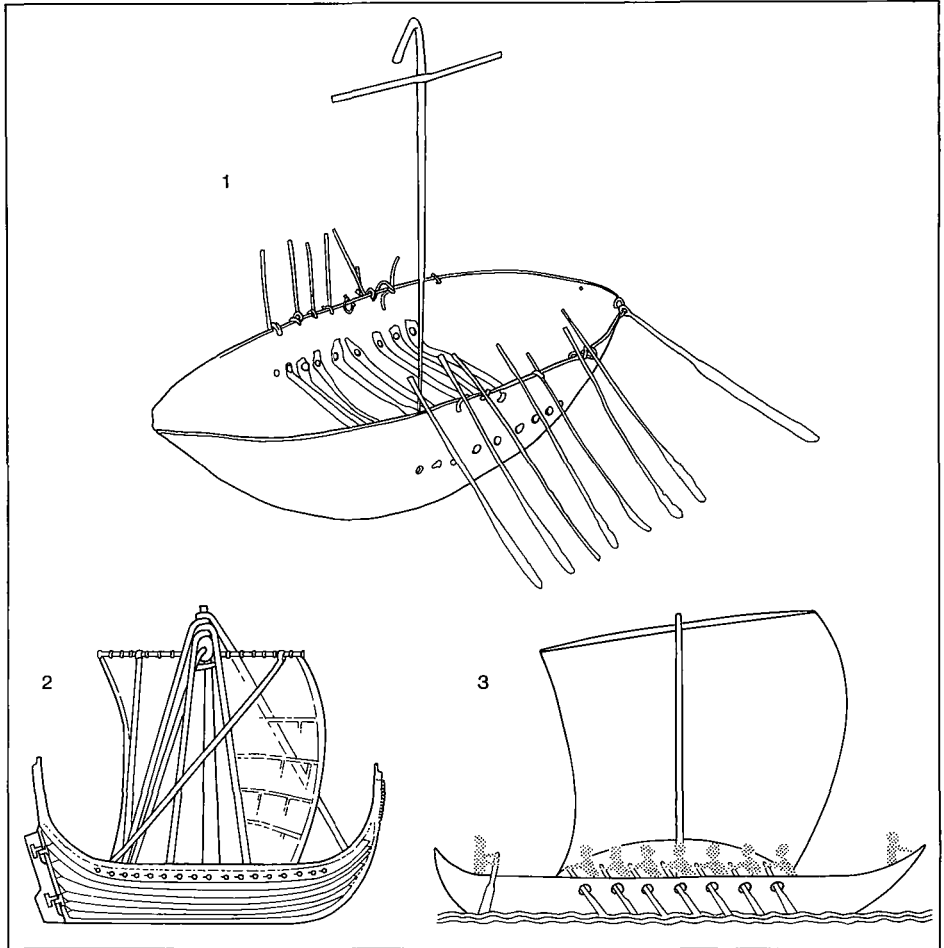
So far as naval warfare is concerned, what is apparently the earliest recorded naval battle in the British Isles was fought between the two Dál Riata kindreds of Cenél Loairn and Cenél nGabráin in AD 719. In this, members of the royal warband or bodyguard were killed (*in quo quidam comites conruerunt*), just as would have been expected in a land battle. It is characteristic of the social bias of our written sources that only the deaths of potentates are considered worthy of mention.

Another battle in which a Dál Riata fleet was involved is recorded in the *Annals of Tigernach* for 733: 'Flaithbertach took the Dál Riata fleet to Ireland, and a great slaughter was made'. The same Annals give us information about the possible size of fleets: in 729 'a hundred and fifty Pictish ships were wrecked at Ross Cuissine'. This may be compared with the total sea-muster of Dál Riata: 140 ships, according to the *Senchus Fer nAlban*. Moreover, if we assume that Pictish ships were comparable in size to those of Dál Riata, then up to 2400 lives would have been lost in this one incident.

Despite losses such as these, it is clear from numerous passages in Adomnán's *Life* of Columba that the Irish and Scots were masters of seamanship in the tricky waters and along the rugged shores of the Argyll-Ulster Lake. The same source makes it clear that ships with both oars and sails were in use. This was an invaluable combination when manoeuvring in sea-lochs and around the islands, for instance in the Firth of Lorn, where a wind might suddenly blow up or—equally unexpectedly—be lost, around any headland or island.

The combination of oars and sail puts us in mind of the well-known West Highland galley of later centuries (illustrations and commentary: Steer & Bannerman 1977, 180-4; here *illus* 39.2). Indeed, it is not unreasonable to regard the ships of Dál Riata as smaller prototypes of the medieval galley. Some idea of their size is given by the sea-muster incorporated in the *Senchus Fer nAlban*, for, as already noticed, this regularly refers to seven-benchers: that is, vessels with 14 oarsmen plus a skipper and a steersman (*illus* 39.3). The later galleys, by contrast, might have up to 24 oars, while the smaller *birlinn* had up to 16.

39  
Vessels with oars  
and sails: 1) the  
Brighter, Co  
Derry, gold model;  
2) medieval galley  
carved on a tomb  
at Rodell, Harris;  
3) a speculative  
depiction of the  
seven-benched  
vessel of the  
*Senchus Fer  
n'Alban*.



A prototype for the ship of the *Senchus* is suggested by the gold model of a boat found at Brighter in Co Derry—not far, that is, from the Irish homeland of the Dál Riata. The model, probably of the 1st century BC, is of a boat with nine rowing benches, a steering oar and a mast for a square-rigged sail (illus 39.1). The character of the model makes it impossible to be certain of the materials used for the original ship, but it seems likely that both the sail and the covering of the hull were of leather (Farrell & Penny 1975; McGrail 1987 *passim*; Neill 1993).

The major technical difference between the West Highland galley and the vessels of earlier times is the replacement of the steering oar by a rudder. Moreover, the galleys are clinker-built, whereas it is not known whether the ships of the *Senchus* were wooden-hulled. None the less, the combination of oars and a square sail may suggest a continuous developing lineage from Brighter, through the ships of the 7th century, to the late medieval galley, without the need to invoke Viking influence on the latter. Little can be said about the vessels of the other nations of northern Britain. Certainly, the two known Pictish illustrations of boats, those on a cross stele at Cossans (Angus) and on the wall of Jonathan's Cave, East Wemyss (Fife), cannot reasonably be interpreted as warships.

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## SOME SIGNIFICANT CAMPAIGNS & BATTLES

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Following the introduction to the motivations of warfare, we proceed to a close study of several major campaigns, all of which had important political repercussions in the later 6th and 7th centuries. In reverse chronological order, not unrelated to decreasing reliability or credibility, these are (illus 40):

- 1: AD 685, Ecgfrith's expedition against the Picts, leading to his defeat and death at *Bellum Duin Nechtain* (Battle of Nechtan's Fort = Nechtansmere or Dunnichen).
- 2: AD 633-4, Cadwallon's campaign against Northumbria, leading to the death of Edwin, and ultimately of Cadwallon.
- 3: AD 616, Æthelfrith's expedition to Chester.
- 4: AD 603, Áedán's hosting against Northumbria.
- 5: pre- AD 600, perhaps *c* 570, the British hosting to *Catraeth* (Catterick).

It must be stressed at the outset that some of the inferences and interpretations which are put forward in this chapter are based on a series of assumptions. Some of these will be discussed and justified in later chapters, but others must remain as assumptions. First, any major expedition of our period would have comprised a mixed body of horse- and foot-soldiers, in varied proportions according to the kingdoms involved. The foot-soldiers would have reduced the speed of movement to about 15 miles (24km) a day. Moreover, even a mounted force would have been hindered by two factors: the need for accompanying grooms; and the need for sumpter- or pack-horses, if only to carry the hard grain which the steeds would require on an expedition (Hughson 1992, 58-9).

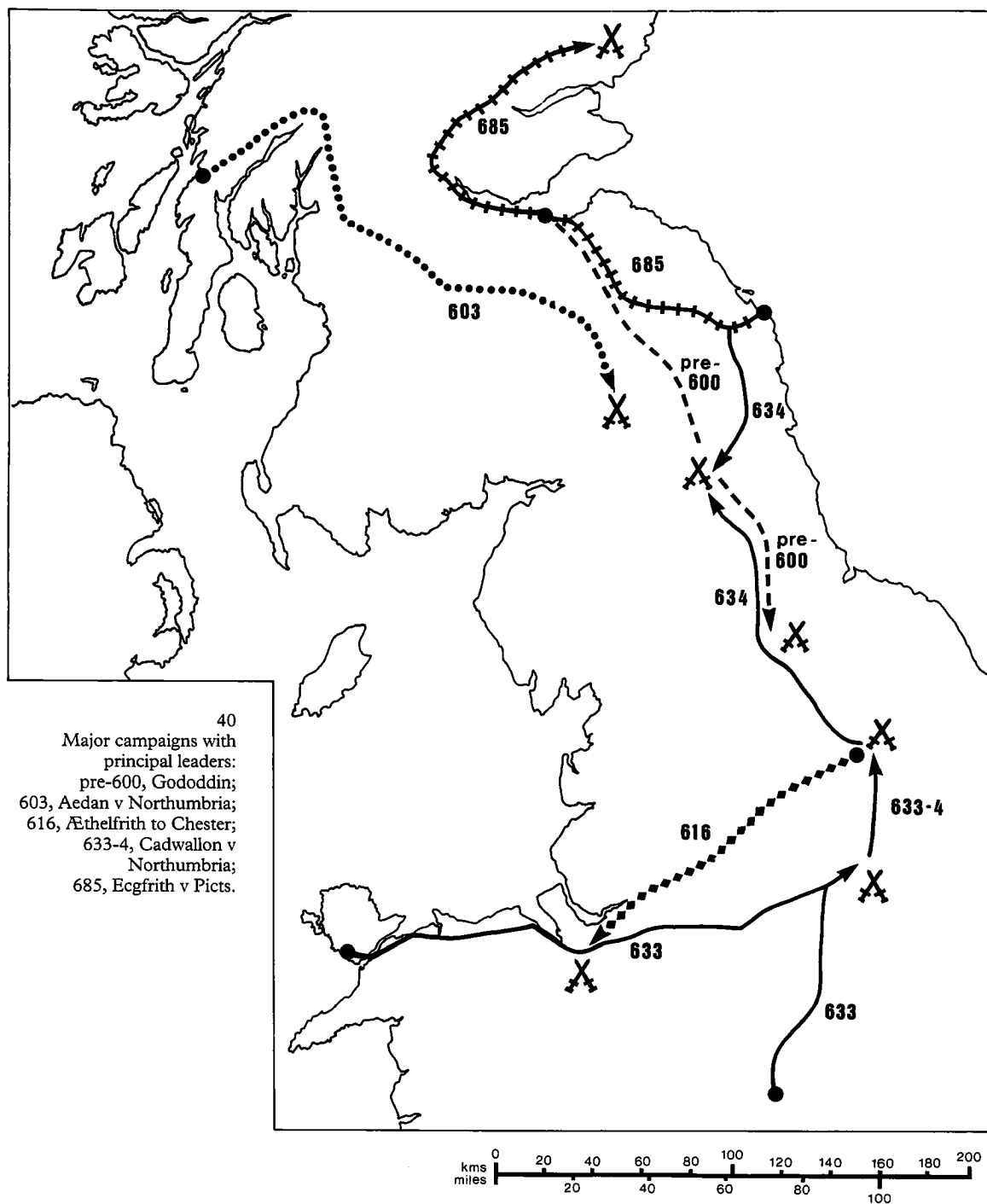
Supplies would also be needed for both noble warriors and common soldiers. In the case of the latter, the practice in a medieval Scottish army was that each man should carry a small bag of oatmeal and an iron plate for cooking bannocks. There might also be some expectation of living off the land, especially on a ravaging expedition. It must always be remembered, however, that this is time-consuming; and because a force becomes scattered, it is also extremely hazardous unless the opposing army has already been neutralised (for much of this paragraph, see Caldwell 1988).

### 10.1 ECGFRITH'S PICTISH EXPEDITION, AD 685

#### 10.1.1 Ecgfrith's early campaigns

Ecgfrith succeeded to the kingdom of Northumbria in AD 670. Within the next two or three years, to cite the language of Northumbrian propaganda (in this case Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*), 'the bestial people of the Picts, with fierce spirit', attempted to throw off the yoke of Saxon (sic) slavery (VW, 19). It may be, as Stephen implies, that they were

testing the martial skills and valour of a new, and possibly weak, king; but it may equally be that the new king himself was expected to prove his mettle, as would certainly have been required of his Irish and Scottic peers.



However that may be, Ecgrith responded promptly—as Stephen has it—in the spirit of Judas Maccabeus (a singularly inept allusion on Stephen's part, considering that Maccabeus was the patriotic leader of Jewish revolt against Syrian domination). Ecgrith raised a small mounted band against the vast enemy, *parva manu... contra inormen hostem*; the parallel with Oswald's defeat of Cadwallon (10.2 below) comes instantly to mind. Large numbers of the enemy were slaughtered, filling two rivers, and the Picts were reduced to slavery (VW, 19).

Subsequently Ecgrith had mixed fortunes against the kingdom of Mercia: victory in AD 674, but a defeat in which his brother was slain in 679. In 684, he instigated a plundering raid in Ireland under the leadership of the ealdorman Berht. Bede gives no reason for this action, and indeed regarded it as sinful because Ecgrith had refused to take the advice of the priest Egbert who had attempted to dissuade him from it. In so far as we may deduce the purpose of an act from its result, we may note that, in addition to plundering churches and monasteries, Berht took a number of prisoners. This suggests that the intention was to take Irish hostages to secure the western flank of Northumbria in anticipation of a far more serious enterprise against the Picts. (For a more elaborate discussion of the possible dynastic issues involved in the Irish raid: Moisl 1983, 103-26).

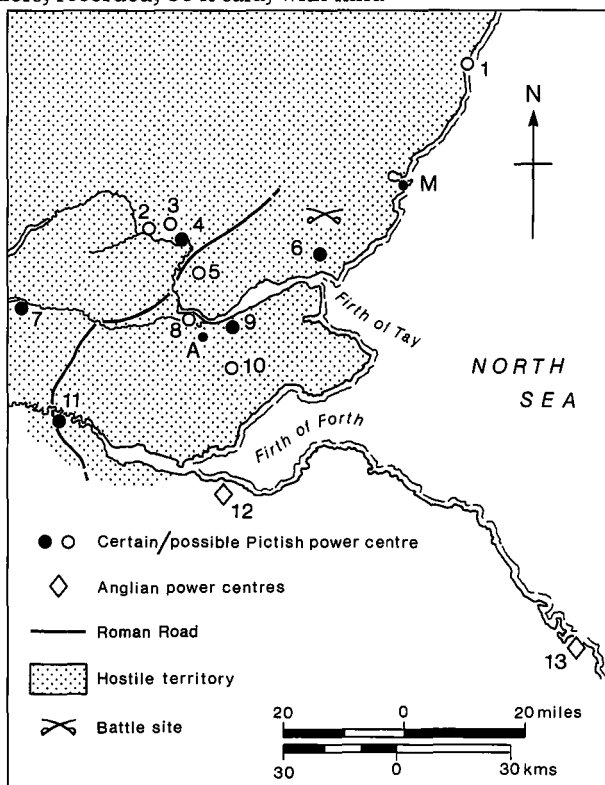
### 10.1.2 Ecgrith's Pictish expedition ends in defeat at Nechtansmere

In May AD 685, apparently immediately after attending the consecration of St Paul's church at Jarrow, Ecgrith undertook a major expedition into Pictland (illus 41). This was despite the disapproval of some of his councillors, recorded, be it said, with hindsight (HE iv, 26). The objective of this is not stated, and we are therefore left to speculate. The season was too early for plunder-taking or tribute-enforcement, because the cattle, not fully recovered from the winter, would have been at the upland summer pastures, while the crops would have barely been showing. Probably the intention was political: to affirm Northumbrian overlordship over the Pictish king Bruide, son of Bili, who had himself been strengthening his rule over the Pictish sub-kingdoms.

Whatever Ecgrith's intentions, the outcome of the expedition was in fact that he and the greater part of his army were slain in a battle first recorded as *Bellum Duin Nechtain*, Battle of (in the vicinity of, for the possession of?) Nechtan's Fort (AU s.a., 685). The name is readily identified with the medieval and modern settlement of Dunnichen in Angus. Immediately overlooking it to the north is Dunnichen Hill; but no satisfactory evidence has been revealed for Nechtan's actual fort.

Bede (who was about 12 years old at the time),

- 41  
Ecgrith's Pictish campaign AD 685  
Key to locations:  
1) Dunottar;  
2) Dunkeld;  
3) Clunie;  
4) Inchtutill 'native' fort;  
5) Dunsinan;  
6) Laws of Monifieth;  
7) Dundurn;  
8) Forteviot;  
9) Clatchard Craig;  
10) East Lomond;  
11) Stirling;  
12) Edinburgh;  
13) Bamburgh.  
M = Montrose Basin;  
A = Abernethy.



later attributed the defeat, firstly to a divine judgement on Ecgfrith because of his maltreatment of the innocent Irish in the previous year; and secondly, in more worldly terms, to the cunning of the Picts who feigned flight and so led Ecgfrith into the defiles of inaccessible mountains. On this we may comment that the rare survivors of a shattered warband are unlikely to give an objective assessment of the reasons for defeat; and divine judgement is an unlikely moving force in a chain of military events. In any case, it is a commonplace of military reporting, not only in a Heroic-age context, that the enemy was deceitful, treacherous, cunning: in brief, did not fight fair.

We, however, must seek other explanations. Knowledge of the Angus landscape immediately casts doubt on Bede's apologia for the defeat. Indeed, further consideration of the topography and historical geography of southern Pictland shows the expedition to have been extraordinarily rash. It is a sound principle of military history that we cannot sensibly deduce the strategy or battle-plans of a defeated leader—self-evidently because they had not been successfully carried out. Despite this, by following Ecgfrith's probable line of march, we may be able to infer something about his objectives and to detect his blunders (illus 41; 42).

### The route

The first part of the route is obvious. Assuming that he started from the major royal stronghold (*civitas regia*) of Bamburgh, Ecgfrith would have taken the north-east coastal route through Anglian-settled territory as far as Edinburgh. Continuing along the south side of the Firth of Forth, he would shortly have entered lands where Pictish influences were still strong: witness the founding of a missionary bishopric to the Picts at Abercorn, on the Forth, and also Bede's implication that the Pictish tongue was still in use around the east end of the Antonine Wall (*HE* i, 12). By the time he reached Stirling, he was certainly out of the area of Anglian settlement, whether among the Britons or the Picts.

Crossing the Forth at Stirling, he was then quite definitely in Pictland. He may also have picked up the line of the Roman road up the Water of Allan, and so across the rivers Earn and Tay, and into Strathmore. If his intention was plunder, at the Earn he had choices: the fertile lands of lower Strathearn; or further east the riches of Fife; or he could continue NE across the Tay to the Carse of Gowrie or the equally rich Strathmore.

The distance which he did actually advance beyond the Earn and the Tay may suggest another possibility, namely that he was heading for the east coast: either to the Montrose basin to rendezvous with a fleet, or to the Dunnottar gap round the Mounth, and so to the fruitful lands of the northern Picts along the Moray Firth. In doing so, he would have been unconsciously following Roman campaign moves, and anticipating those of Edward I (Maxwell 1986).

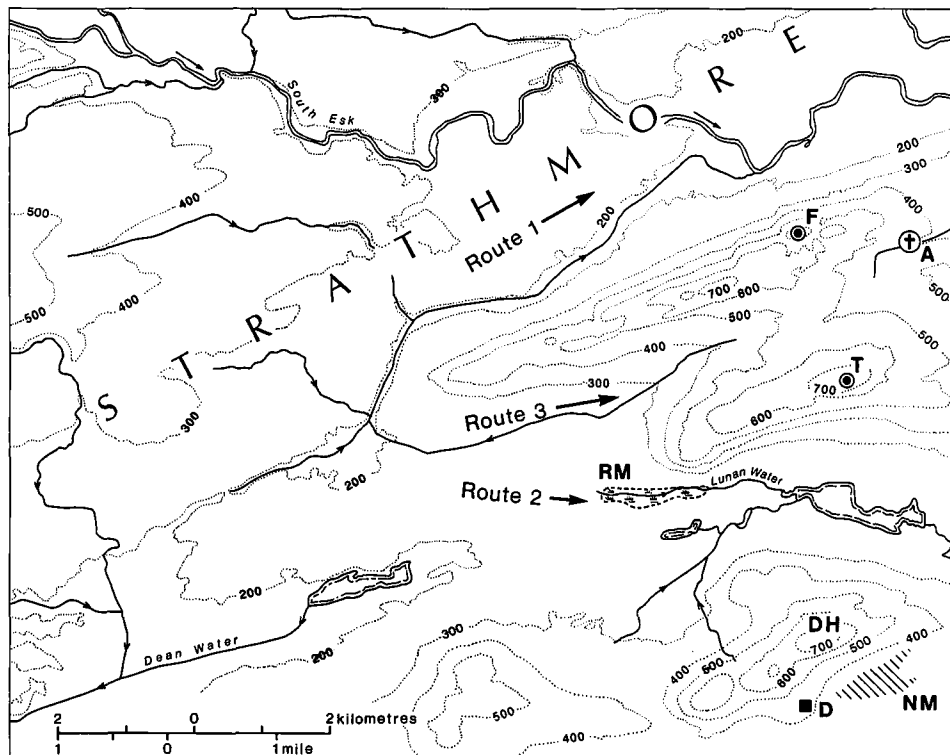
### Tactics

To ensure success in any of these enterprises, Ecgfrith would have needed an early defeat of the Pictish king Bruide, son of Bili, and the destruction of his army, as Cadwallon and Penda had destroyed Edwin half a century earlier. It was obviously in Bruide's interest, therefore, to delay a pitched battle, by taking advantage of his familiarity with the country. A further reason for delay would have been the need to assemble forces from Strathearn and Fife as well as from the line of Ecgfrith's advance, even at the expense of leaving peasant settlements without protection.

At this point, a modern commentator must consider what the possibility might have been of forcing Bruide to the field of battle. In lower Strathearn there were several minor forts, with the major fortress of Dundurn (illus 66 below) hardly a day's march from the Roman road. To the east, the equally important stronghold of Clatchard Craig was little more than a day's march away, with an early Pictish centre at Abernethy (witnessed by a Pictish Class 1 stone), and at least one major undefended settlement at Mugdrum lying between Clatchard Craig and the Roman road.

A policy of plundering the open settlements, and besieging one or other of the forts would very likely have brought Bruide to their defence, and would thus have forced a battle on ground—and at a time—chosen by Ecgrith. Instead, he proceeded into Strathmore, leaving these strongholds on his flanks, while pushing further into hostile territory, where there were yet more flanking strongholds.

Given such apparent folly on Ecgrith's part, no great cunning was required of Bruide. None the less, it seems possible that the ground for the final battle was chosen with care by the Picts; and we may usefully speculate on the actual battle-site (illus 42). (We will continue to use the commonly-cited English name for the battle, 'Nechtansmere', although this was not known before the 12th century.) Despite the *dun*/fort element in the earliest record, it is unlikely that a hillfort was Ecgrith's objective: in the Scottish entries in the Irish Annals, the terms *obsessio* (siege), or even *combustio* (burning), are normal for attacks on fortified places, rather than the vague term *bellum* (battle).



42

The approach to  
Ecgrith's fatal  
battle

Key to locations:  
A = Aberlemno,  
Pictish cross-  
slab with battle  
scene;

D = Dunnichen  
village;

DH = Dunnichen  
Hill;

F = Finavon  
hillfort;

NM = supposed  
location of  
Nechtansmere;  
RM = Restenneth  
Moss, drained  
before 1792;

T = Turin hillfort.

As for Bede's 'defiles of inaccessible mountains', these are the recollections of a shattered army, and need to be toned down very considerably to fit the topography between Strathmore and Dunnichen Hill. Three alternative routes might be suggested (illus 42); and one further piece of evidence weighs in favour of the suggested Route 2. Around AD 830, the *Historia Brittonum* refers to the battle as *Gueith Lin Garan*, the 'Battle at Crane Lake' (J Morris 1980, 36 & 77). Route 2 traverses a valley between Dunnichen Hill and Turin Hill which is notable for a string of lakes and swamps. It may reasonably be conjectured that it was in this valley that Ecgrith and his army met disaster. But the only certain fact is that of Ecgrith's defeat. (For a detailed analysis of the sources see Alcock 1996).

### 10.1.3 Aftermath

Bede, making much of the divine judgement on Ecgrith for his sins against the Irish, sets out a mournful catalogue of politico-military repercussions. Not only did the Picts recover land held by the English; so too did the Scots of Dál Riata, and some of the Britons too. Even the Northumbrian mission to the Picts, only recently established at Abercorn beside the Firth of Forth, was abandoned, its bishop Trumwine retiring to Whithorn. In summary, 'the hopes and strength of the English kingdom began to "ebb and fall away"' (a quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid* ii, 169: Colgrave & Mynors 1969, 428, n 3).

A modern historian, on the other hand, might wish to stress that it was only subsequent to the battle of Nechtansmere—and more especially in the first half of the 8th century—that the great flowering of Insular art and craftsmanship occurred (discussed below 18.1.1), with contributions from the English (and especially from Northumbria), the Irish, the Scots, and the Picts. And to the artefacts, both ecclesiastical and secular, we should add the writings of Adomnán, Stephen and above all, Bede himself.

## 10.2 CADWALLON'S RAVAGING OF NORTHUMBRIA, AD 633-634

### 10.2.1 Background to confrontation with Edwin

The long-term background to Cadwallon's ravaging of Northumbria is to be found in the expansionist policies of Edwin and his precursor Æthelfrith, whom we shall see below in action against Áedán, king of Dál Riata. Bede writes enthusiastically about Æthelfrith as a brave king eager for glory, who ravaged the Britons more than any other English king (*HE* i, 4). Now Bede, writing a century after Æthelfrith's death, cannot have known this for a fact; nor can we test it, given our limited knowledge of English warfare against the Britons (Sims-Williams 1994). Nor does it help a historical assessment to suggest that Bede's account 'may have been influenced by some lost heroic poem' (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, 116 n. 1).

We may prefer to read the whole passage in the light of Bede's unremitting hostility to the Britons, a hostility which in modern terms might be described as a wholehearted endorsement of 'ethnic cleansing' or genocide. But however much we may incline to tone down Bede's enthusiasm for Æthelfrith's ravaging, we cannot doubt that it did take place. Moreover, his slayer and successor, Edwin, pursued similar expansionist policies, which led him, in Bede's words (*HE* ii, 5), to rule over all the peoples of Britain (with the exception of Kent). He even subjected Anglesey and Man to his rule, implying the existence of a Northumbrian war-fleet in the Irish Sea.

Edwin's seizure of Anglesey inevitably brought him into conflict with Cadwallon, ruler of Gwynedd, whom he besieged on a small island off Anglesey. According to one tradition, Cadwallon was even driven into exile in Ireland. He returned, however, in AD 632 or 633, and allied himself not with his British neighbours in the kingdom of Powys, but with Penda, a doughty warrior and pagan king of Anglian Mercia, which had also been suffering from Edwin's expansion. Together they advanced, Penda probably in a northerly direction, along the former Roman road from the vicinity of Tamworth, and Cadwallon, using a Roman road across the Cheshire plain, traversing the southern Pennines, to pick up the road from Buxton. The allies would then have joined forces about 12 miles (19km) SW of Doncaster (illus 40).

Meanwhile, Edwin, also using available Roman roads south from York, had advanced across the Humber and its tributaries on to the plain of *Hæthfelth*, Hatfield Chase. There, on October 12th, AD 633, he met the allies. In the Welsh eulogy of Cadwallon, there is a hint that Edwin sought to parley, but this was rejected by the Welsh; and Edwin's death followed. In Bede's stark words, the whole of his army was either slain or broken up (*HE* ii, 20).

### 10.2.2 The scale and extent of Cadwallon's ravaging (illus 40)

The slaying of Edwin, and the destruction of the Northumbrian army, created an ideal opportunity for settling decades of blood-feuds, accumulated from the days of Æthelfrith as well as Edwin. Such a campaign of honourable vengeance could well be combined with tribute-taking or plunder, terms with closely similar meanings. Such actions must depend for success on the absence of any organized defence. But the repercussions of the deaths of Edwin and one of his sons were even worse, because Northumbria split into its two component sub-kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia. Their respective rulers were themselves slain in the following summer.

The implication of this is that Cadwallon's expedition, begun late in the campaigning season of AD 633, extended into the summer of 634. In fact, late autumn was the ideal season for taking tribute or plunder—as the border reivers of the 16th century well knew—because the crops were gathered, the cattle were down from the summer pastures, and they and their followers were strong enough to be driven long distances. This may well be why Penda and the Mercians withdrew from the campaign, having won a sufficient booty in the autumn of 633. What we do not know is whether Cadwallon also returned to Gwynedd for the winter with his plunder, though this would have been a sensible policy.

However that may be, Cadwallon continued his ravaging of Northumbria through the summer of 634, intending, according to Bede, to wipe out the whole stock of the English from Britain (*HE* ii, 20). There is an echo here, in reverse, of the policy of Æthelfrith, whom Bede had so applauded for laying waste, subjugating or exterminating the native Britons. From a wider perspective, however, we may ask whether that was Cadwallon's real objective, as opposed to the realisable aims of throwing off an oppressive overlordship and taking further plunder from defenceless kingdoms. There is, indeed, a suggestion in Cadwallon's poetic eulogy that he was laying claim to be battle-leader and lord of Britain, as Bede had claimed for Edwin (Bromwich & Jones 1978, 3; Gruffydd 1978, espec 29-30. I am grateful to Prof Geraint Gruffydd for guiding me on the English translation of the eulogy).

What is somewhat uncertain, however, is the actual territorial extent of Cadwallon's ravaging. Bede makes two widely sweeping but vague statements:

- 1) after the slaying of Edwin at *Hæthfelth*, Cadwallon ranged raving (*debachando pervagatus*) through all the provinces of the Northumbrians (*HE* ii, 20);
- 2) Cadwallon occupied the Northumbrian kingdoms for a whole year (*HE* iii, 1).

This may have been so, but it is interesting that this ravaging seems not to have disturbed the teaching and baptizing of James the Deacon, who was based on Edwin's church at York (*HE* ii, 20). When we seek geographical details, there are only two sites which may be precisely identified. (This interpretation follows James's justified rejection (1979, 38, n 8) of the Colgrave-Mynors identification (1969, 213, n 2) of the *oppidum municipium* where Osric was slain (*HE* iii, 1) as York).

The first of these sites is *Campodunum*, identified as being in the district of Loidis/Elmet, that is, near the southern border of Deira. Cadwallon is not mentioned by name, but the reference to the *pagani* who killed Edwin is clear enough. The main reason for the mention of *Campodunum* is that the church there was the scene of a miracle (*HE* ii, 14). The second is Heavenfield, near Hexham, where Cadwallon was to meet his death at the hands of Oswald (*HE* iii, 1-2).

### 10.2.3 Cadwallon's death at Heavenfield and its outcome

The location of Cadwallon's fatal battle is curious, since it lies 40 miles (65km)—say three days' march—south of the important Bernician power-centres of Bamburgh, Milfield and Yeavering, and is distinctly nearer to the Tees valley borderland with Deira. The obvious military questions are: was Cadwallon, at the end of a year of ravaging, still advancing northwards towards the major Bernician power centre at Bamburgh; or was he falling back from that area in the face of Oswald's advance?

Answers to these questions are obviously beyond the historian's reach, but given that Cadwallon had the combat record of slaying three kings, whereas Oswald was unblooded, it would seem unlikely that Cadwallon was in retreat. Such an inference gives us reason to doubt whether Cadwallon had ever advanced as far as The Cheviot, let alone beyond it. Certainly there is no historical evidence to the contrary. (For the relevance of this to the chronology of Yeavering, see below, 15.2).

What is clear is the outcome of Heavenfield. The British king and his army were destroyed, and any hope of driving the Angles out of Northumbria, still less of gaining for Gwynedd the overlordship of Britain, was crushed. This was a major politico-military success for Northumbria; but we should not accept uncritically all the inflated language of Northumbrian patriotism, which is made stronger by Bede's hatred of the Britons as heretics and worse. It is characteristic, not only of Bede but of other writers, that Oswald is reported to have had only a small army to oppose forces which were both immense and reputedly invincible. This topos of Heroic-age battle-reporting makes it quite impossible to establish even the relative, let alone the actual, strengths of the armies of Cadwallon, Edwin, Oswald and Penda.

We can, however, suggest something about the distances which the combatants had travelled; from Cadwallon's probable centre at Aberffraw on Anglesey to Hatfield, 170

miles (275 km), but from the Mercian centre, probably at Tamworth, only 70 miles (110km). If Edwin had advanced from York to Hatfield, this was a mere 40 miles (64km). Cadwallon, however, was 220 crow miles (or 335km) from home (and considerably further in real terms), when he was slain at Heavenfield.

Finally, we should notice some of the religious aspects of Oswald's victory, which had their background in his upbringing in the Columban monastery of Iona. Firstly, Adomnán reports an Ionan tradition, which he had received from his own predecessor, Fáilbe, who in turn had heard it from Oswald himself. This was to the effect that, on the night before the battle, Oswald had experienced a vision or dream of Columba, who had promised him victory over Cadwallon (*VC*, 8b-9a). Secondly Bede relates that in his own day the place was still shown where, on the eve of the battle, Oswald himself set up a wooden cross and encouraged his army to pray for victory. The cross was still there despite the custom of cutting chips from it for holy cures (*HE* iii, 2). It would need a very determined sceptic to doubt that the inspiration of Oswald's dream was a major morale factor in his victory.

### 10.3 ÆTHELFRITH'S EXPEDITION TO CHESTER

(illus 40)

In AD 613 (but correctly 616), the *Annales Cambriae* record 'Battle of Chester (*Caer Legion*), and there fell Selyf, son of Cynan, king of Powys'. The event was also recorded in the Irish Annals, but the most extensive account is provided by Bede. He reports that Æthelfrith collected a great army, and made a great slaughter of the Britons. The latter were described by Bede as 'heretics', essentially because they had rejected the Augustinian mission in favour of pre-Augustinian Christianity. The victims of Æthelfrith's massacre included about 1200 monks who had come from the monastery at Bangor-on-Dee (14 miles [22km] distant) to pray for their fellow Britons. Bede saw the slaughter as divine retribution which had been foretold by Augustine himself (*HE* ii, 2).

Historical discussion of this battle has largely concentrated on the massacre, and especially on Bede's presentation of it, rather than on Æthelfrith's military and political motivation for the hosting. As we have already noted, Æthelfrith's aggression against the Britons was applauded by Bede in the words 'he laid waste the British race more than any other English ruler' (*HE* i, 34). The attack on the illustrious former Roman site of Chester would have been fully in keeping with his reputation. We might also recall that it presaged Edwin's attacks on the princes of north Wales, which provoked the retaliation of Cadwallon in AD 633-634. As for Æthelfrith's route, it is a reasonable conjecture that this would have been across the southern Pennines along the former Roman road from York to Chester (for discussion of sources and analysis of the battle, not wholly followed here, see NK Chadwick 1963).

### 10.4 ÁEDÁN'S HOSTING TO BERNICIA

(illus 40)

In Bede's view, it was Æthelfrith's expansionist policy which provoked a response in AD 603 from an unexpectedly distant kingdom, namely Scottish Dál Riata, under its ruler

Áedán, son of Gabráin. Bede, writing more than a century after the event, was probably ignorant of Áedán's own aggressive activities, which included hostings against Orkney and the Isle of Man (Sharpe 1995, 270-1). Nearer at hand, and therefore more threatening to Bernicia, was his intervention against the Miathi or Macatae, a rather obscure people in southern Pictland, who had probably expanded south of the Forth valley. From this, it might have been feared in Bernicia that Áedán's next move would have been into the relatively rich lands south of the Forth, which were not yet heavily settled by the Angles.

The potential threat might have provoked a preventive counter-attack by Æthelfrith. This, however, is not how Bede presented events (*HE* i, 34). Having praised Æthelfrith (comparing him, indeed, with King Saul of Israel), Bede reports that Áedán, alarmed by Anglian successes, raised a huge and powerful army and led it against the English king. The armies met at a place named as *Degsastan* by Bede. On the assumption that this has been correctly identified with Dawston Rigg, at the western end of Cheviot, Áedán probably had to move over 160 miles (260 km), whereas starting from Bamburgh, Æthelfrith would have travelled only about 50 miles (80 km).

The outcome was that Áedán's army was annihilated, the king himself escaping with only a few followers. But Bernician casualties were also heavy, for the king's brother Theobald was slain along with all his contingent. Áedán himself made no further attempt to curb Æthelfrith.

## 10.5 THE NORTHERN BRITISH HOSTING TO *CATRAETH*/CATTERICK

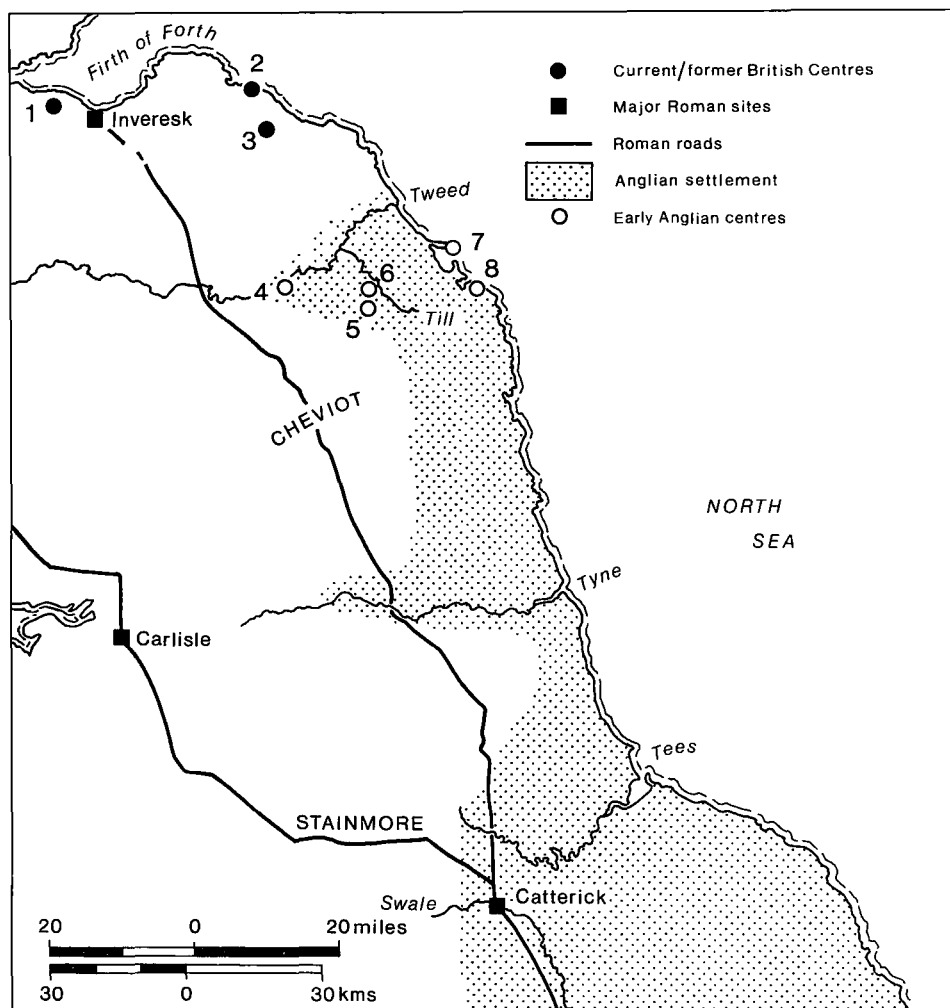
### 10.5.1 The sources

The sources for the campaigns which we have considered so far have been those familiar to historians of the Early Historic period, ranging from the briefest of annal-entries to extended reports, often heavily overlain with religious themes, and for the most part written long after the events. The sources for the expedition of the Northern Britons seeking to control *Catraeth* are quite different: namely heroic poetry in Old Welsh.

Outwith the circle of dedicated scholars of Early Welsh language and literature, the most widely known source for the *Catraeth* campaign is the major poem known as *Y Gododdin* (*YG*), attributed to the bard Aneirin. This is because an acceptable English translation has been available for nearly 30 years (Jackson 1969), and this has been reinforced by texts with translations by Jarman (1988) and Koch (1997).

In the simplest terms (but now much reconstructed by Koch), Aneirin tells of a hosting by 303 mounted heroes from the kingdom of Gododdin, who set out from *Din Eidyn*/Edinburgh to attack the walled place of *Catraeth*/Catterick (illus 43). Despite desperate deeds of heroism, and some incredible feats of weapon-play—against an Anglian force numbering thousands—all except three of the heroes were slain. But this simple story-line has to be reconstructed from nearly a hundred elegiac stanzas, frequently in the form of 'chains' in which each successive stanza begins with a phrase such as 'Warriors went to *Catraeth* with the dawn'. A date in the mid- or later 6th century is inferred, but is not beyond question (Dumville 1988).

These stanzas would have been recited orally, most probably in the royal feasting hall



43

The Northern  
British hosting to  
Catraeth

Key to numbers:

- 1) Din Eidyn/  
Edinburgh;
- 2) Dunbar;
- 3) Traprain Law;
- 4) Sprouston;
- 5) Yeavering;
- 6) Milfield;
- 7) Lindisfarne;
- 8) Bamburgh.

at *Din Eidyn* itself. But the only written version which we have is a work of the 13th century. At least two—and very probably more—recensions can be detected in the written version. From these, Koch has attempted (1997, 2-129) to reconstruct the most archaic—and the most innovative—texts as well as an intermediate version. Koch's recensions follow a running series of discussions about the size, composition, equipment, tactics and weapon-play of the Gododdin army. Such topics are discussed here in the appropriate chapters (11 and 12). The details of Koch's major study, however, are beyond the academic scope of the present volume, though they will inspire considerable discussion, and even debate, among students of heroic literature and the Welsh language.

In the present survey, it is appropriate to confine the discussion to evidence from the fields of archaeology, history and topography. What follows accepts the traditional interpretation of the Gododdin story-line, and then examines the most likely route for a hosting from Edinburgh to Catterick. More especially, it questions the likelihood of mid- or late 6th-century Catterick as an objective for a military expedition (illus 43).

### 10.5.2 The route and location

In the past there has been some discussion of the likely route south from Edinburgh. It might have been expected that this would have been along Dere Street, the former Roman road which ran fairly directly from Inveresk on the Firth of Forth, over The Cheviot and ultimately to Catterick and beyond. This route certainly remained in use for traffic and border warfare in later centuries (Barrow 1984; Maxwell 1984). But it has been claimed that this would have been dangerously close to the nascent Anglian settlements in Bernicia. Crawford (1939) therefore suggested a route through the Southern Uplands to Carlisle, and thence over Stainmore to Catterick.

From our present knowledge of the early settlement of Bernicia, this indirect route seems unnecessary. The major relevant settlement cluster is that which may conveniently be called the Bamburgh-Yeaving group. Of this cluster, the nearest significant settlement is that at Sprouston, which is 11 miles (18km) downstream from Dere Street, and separated from it by rugged terrain ideal for covering the movement of an army. Further south there is little evidence for any concentration of Anglian settlement until the Tees valley is reached 10 miles (16km) north of Catterick (Cramp 1988, map p 72; Sherlock & Welch 1992, maps figs 2 & 3). The total distance on Dere Street would have been about 130 miles/ 210 km, taking less than ten days for a mixed force of horse and foot. As we have seen in the previous pages, this is within the range of well-documented 7th-century hostings; though it will have been noted that they mostly ended in defeat.

Thus far, the appeal to history and topography can demonstrate the feasibility of a hosting from Edinburgh to Catterick. But the more serious question is this: could 6th-century Catterick have provided an acceptable objective for a long-distance expedition, whether in terms of military *realpolitik*, or the romantic mentality of Heroic poetry? For an attempt to answer this question, we must turn to the evidence of the history and archaeology of the Roman and Early Historic centuries.

### 10.5.3 The nature of the Catterick settlement

The evidence of written history is very meagre. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, of AD 731, has three references to Catterick, but in two cases these are merely topographic indicators to other places (*HE* ii, 20; iii, 14). The other mention is more interesting, because it refers to Paulinus baptising in the river Swale, which flows beside *vicus Cataractam* (*HE* ii, 14). This must have been before the death of Edwin in 633.

The political and social significance of the term *vicus* is difficult to establish. In Classical Latin, it means 'village, hamlet, country seat'; but in Bede and some other sources, it seems to be elevated from a rural settlement of uncertain status to the central place of a royal estate (Campbell 1979a). For instance, Bede describes *Ad Murum* indifferently as a royal *vicus* (*HE* iii, 21) and a royal *villa* (*HE* iii, 22). On the other hand, having used the term *villa regia* of Yeaving, and by implication of Milfield, in the following paragraph he calls Catterick simply *vicus* (*HE* ii, 14). This seems to be a warning against inflating the status of post-Roman Catterick.

This warning is reinforced by the archaeological evidence for the Anglian settlement of Catterick. This has recently been clarified by the publication of excavations carried out over more than 50 years, and distributed over two miles (3km) both sides of the river Swale (Wilson *et al* 1997, fig 1). It is specifically noted that many of these archaeolog-

ical interventions produced no evidence for Anglian structures or burials, and thus a picture of quite sporadic settlement was presented. These results totally refute an earlier suggestion that 'Anglian occupation might have been firmly consolidated by 600', with the implication that an expedition from Edinburgh to Catterick was especially foolhardy (Alcock 1987a, 253).

In more detail, the excavations have revealed no Thirlings-type peasant buildings, let alone Yeavinger-style royal halls, and only three examples of the lowest social level of domestic structures, the sunken-floored building or *Grubenhaus* (Wilson *et al* 1997, figs 3, 7 & 11; for comparisons, see 16.2 below). One of the latter class was cut through the floor of a derelict Roman theatre. Anglian burials too were scanty, the largest group consisting of seven (possibly eight) flexed skeletons aligned with the walls of long-derelict Roman buildings. The pottery chronology suggests settlement beginning by the later 5th century, and extending through the 6th into the 7th century. Other artefacts support this chronology, with emphasis on the 6th century.

The burial goods suggest a range of social status, while lacking anything of the highest rank. Four elaborately-ornamented brooches have long been known (Alcock 1987a, 251-2, fig 16.9 & table 1). To them may be added a brooch in the form of a circular sheet of bronze with a cut-out swastika motif (Wilson 1997, fig 13). A latch-lifter (*ibid*, fig 23.3) may also display matronly status, but for the most part, personal jewellery consists of simple buckles, sleeve-clasps and annular brooches. Of weapons, no swords have been recorded from the site, and only seven spears: a contrast to the thousands of Angles reputedly slain by the Gododdin host. From the available evidence—the caveat which must be observed in all archaeological discussion—there seems to have been little at Catterick worth either plundering or defending.

### Roman Catterick

A very different picture presents itself when we turn to Roman Catterick (summary account in Burnham & Wachter 1990, 111-117, with figs 30 & 31). Briefly, *Cataractonium* began in the late 1st century AD as an auxiliary fort overlooking the crossing of the Swale. The fort was abandoned in *c* AD 120, but the walled area was expanded into a walled town with a regular street layout, a prosperous civil settlement to the east, and suburbs north of the river. In the later 4th century, after the Roman military recovery from a barbarian uprising, a military unit, probably of cavalry, was stationed at *Cataractonium*. This was probably one of the latest military posts to be established in the North.

Over the four centuries or more of its Roman existence, Catterick acquired a variety of civilized amenities, and buildings, official, public, commercial and religious. The amenities included an aqueduct and piped water-supply to official buildings and bathhouses. Among the more important buildings was an official staging-post, with a porticoed courtyard and ornamental fountain. Other masonry buildings included bathhouses, temples and a theatre, thought to have been for religious performances. There were, of course, shops and workshops (including one used by a copper-smith). Some of these enjoyed the luxury of hypocausts, and some buildings had painted wall-plaster. Religious monuments included several altars and an ornate Jupiter column.

Such sights and delights would have been unknown to those Britons who dwelt north of Carlisle and Corbridge—except, perhaps, for those who had taken part in plundering

during the northern uprising of the late 4th century. Some of these may indeed have taken home wonder-tales which came to be absorbed in the legendary or mythic perception of richer lands to the south. The term 'legendary' is stressed because, although some Roman buildings may have survived at Catterick into the 5th century, the mid-6th century presented a picture of derelict ramparts; burials dug into grassy mounds overlying collapsed walls, or even into the walls themselves; and the previously-mentioned *Grubenhaus* cut through the floor of a former theatre (Wilson *et al* 1997).

One further aspect of *Catraeth* has been little considered: its communications, inherited from the system of Roman roads. Mention has already been made of Roman Dere Street, running from the Firth of Forth over The Cheviot, and thence through Catterick to York. To this must be added the equally important road from Carlisle and over Stainmore, which joined Dere Street about four miles (7km) north of Catterick (illus 43). In other words, Catterick was virtually a nodal point in communications with the British kingdoms of Rheged to the north-west and Gododdin to the north. Moreover, the route over Stainmore provides a context for the cross-Pennine interests of Rheged.

It should be stressed here that these interests are stated not in regular historical sources, but in panegyric poetry. In two of Taliesin's poems in praise of Urien, the mid- or late 6th-century lord of Rheged, he is presented as a successful cattle-raider, leader of the men of *Catraeth*, and lord of *Catraeth* (CT II & VIII; translations in Koch 1997, xxvii; Pennar 1988, 91-4). In terms of political reality, such titles would hardly have been justifiable honorifics in the later 6th century. On the other hand, as recollections of the past glories of *Cataractonium*, transmitted along the trans-Pennine Stainmore road, perhaps as a result of a hosting in the late 4th-century uprising, they would have seemed very fitting.



This discussion has been deliberately—some may think provocatively—reductionist. Its foundations are the published archaeological evidence from Romano-British and Anglian Catterick, which has expanded greatly within the last decade. This must now provide the starting-point for re-thinking the political and military realities which underlay the imaginative creations of later bards. This in no way diminishes the status of the poetry, or its crucial importance in revealing the mentalities of the Northern British Heroic Age.

## 10.6 TWO SIGNIFICANT ATTACKS ON FORTIFIED PLACES: *ALT CLUT AND DUNADD*

It has only been possible to reconstruct these major campaigns because the origins and destinations of the combatants are known with reasonable precision. There are indeed many other written references to military actions, especially in various annals, but they are mostly too fragmentary to be informative. To mention one class of action in particular: especially in the late 7th and early 8th centuries, there are frequent references to attacks on fortified places. These are normally reported in the Irish Annals in the form 'siege, burning or destruction' (*obsessio, combustio, distructio*) of a named fort (Bannerman 1974, 9-26; texts in *AU*).

Notices in this form are chiefly confined to Scotland. In Ireland, however, the normal

formula is 'battle', *bellum*, followed by a place-name, which may indeed be the name of a hill, or even a fort. It may be inferred that in Irish warfare the hill serves as a topographical indicator rather than as a military objective. For the most part the Scottish entries are too brief to indicate who the besiegers were, or what the outcome of the siege might have been. There are, however, two instances where the notice is full enough to provide us with valuable historical information.

First, in AD 736, as part of the long struggle between the Picts and the Scots for supremacy north of the Forth-Clyde line, the Pictish king Oengus, son of Fergus, ravaged the lands of Dál Riata, captured Dunadd, burned 'Creic', and bound in chains two royal sons. Creic has not been identified, but Dunadd is a well-known fortress of the Scots (described below 13.2). We cannot know how widely or how savagely Dál Riata was ravaged; we merely note that this was a normal action in any struggle for overlordship, and that Oengus' overlordship lasted until *c* AD 750. The most interesting element here is the putting in chains of the two royal sons: a characteristic example of the taking of noble or royal hostages as guarantors for the good behaviour of the defeated party.

Secondly, in AD 870, two Norse kings from Dublin, Olaf and Ivar, besieged the citadel of *Alt Clut* (Dumbarton Rock) on the Clyde; and after four months they destroyed and plundered it. So thorough was that destruction that this major fortress is not heard of again until the 13th century.

In strategic terms, the destruction of *Alt Clut* opened up the Clyde and its tributaries, and the fertile lands through which they flowed, to a massive slave raid. As the annal for 871 records, Olaf and Ivar returned to *Alt Clut* from Scotland (*Alba*) with 200 ships, and a great booty of English and Britons and Picts was led away to captivity in Ireland. While the importance of communications by sea and river is a constant feature of our period, this annal introduces two new elements: the large size and determination of Viking hosts, capable of reducing a major and formidable fortress, and the large scale of their slave-raiding operations. This seems to go far beyond the practice of earlier centuries; namely, the taking, in the course of battle, of prisoners who might be ransomed or alternatively sold as slaves.

These two relatively full annal entries may help us to fill out in imagination some of the implications of the normal two- or three-word entries which are so characteristic of many annals. (For a fuller discussion of military action at defended sites, see 13.4).

## 10.7 ONE WARRIOR'S EXPERIENCE OF BATTLE

It is fitting that this chapter should end with a detailed study of Bede's account of one Northumbrian soldier, called Imma, both on the battlefield and subsequently (*HE* iv, 22). It raises at once the little-discussed question of Bede's reliability, especially because he himself was only about six years old at the time of the battle of AD 679 between Northumbria and Mercia. Bede bases his account—essentially a miracle story—on the evidence of those who had heard it from Imma himself, and thus he justifies its inclusion in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Modern historical judgements would probably be more sceptical (eg Wallace-Hadrill 1988, xxv-xxvi). Apart from the difficulties of separating history from hagiography, the account raises interesting problems about the nomenclature of social status and its modern translations.

Bede introduces Imma simply as a young man (*iuuenis*), in the defeated army of king Ælfwine of Northumbria. He is not described as noble, though elsewhere in the *Historia* Bede does use adjectives such as *nobilis* or *optimus* to indicate rank. Imma was seriously wounded, and was captured by men of the enemy (ie Mercian) army (*a viris hostilis exercitus*), who took him to their lord (*dominus*), a nobleman (*comes*) of king Æthelred.

Imma was no doubt conscious that, in revenge for Mercian casualties, he was at the mercy of the blood feud—rightly so as the sequel reveals. He was therefore frightened to admit that he was *miles*, and claimed that he was a poor married peasant (*rusticus et pauper*) who had come with others like himself *propter victum militibus adferendum*, ‘to bring food to the soldiers’. There may be an inference here that food-renders owed by a non-combatant peasantry might be delivered to the battlefield when appropriate.

### Military terms

At this point, we encounter a conflict of translations (discussed above 5.2.2). Colgrave & Mynors translate the first *miles* as ‘thegn’, but the second, in the plural, merely as ‘soldiers’ (1969, 403). Sherley-Price *et al* translate the first as ‘soldier’ and the second as ‘the army’ (1990, 241). His translation as ‘soldier’ is to be preferred to Colgrave’s as ‘thegn’, because it is literally correct, and makes no assumptions about the status of Imma, or about the equivalence of Latin *miles* and Old English *thegn*.

The Mercian nobleman had Imma’s wounds attended to, but also ordered that he should be shackled, probably with the intention that he should be sold as a slave. At this point, Bede’s account becomes a miracle story on the theme of the falling-off of chains, after Biblical models such as that of Peter’s imprisonment (Acts, 12:7; discussion by Wallace-Hadrill 1988, xxv-xxvi; and note also the near-contemporary case of Bishop Wilfrid, *VW*, xxxviii). Bede attributed the freeing of Imma’s shackles to the masses offered by his brother, a priest who believed that he had found Imma’s body on the battlefield. The falling-off continued even after he had been sold to a Frisian merchant, and ultimately led to his being ransomed.

Further items of information complicate the discussion of Imma’s status. Firstly, his captors came to the belief, on the evidence of his appearance, behaviour and speech, that he was not a poor commoner, *non erat de paupere vulgo*, but of noble descent, *sed de nobilis*. The nobleman then interrogated Imma, under a promise that no harm would come to him, and he confessed to having been *minister regis*; indeed, in the sequel it emerges that he had been *reginae Aedilthrydae...minister*. Here we encounter another problem in translation. *Minister* is frequently translated as ‘thegn’, presumably because it was thus translated in the Old English version of Bede’s *Historia*, written in the late 9th century. (For the same reason, the Latin *comes*, translated here as ‘nobleman’, is frequently Anglecised as ‘gesith’). But a review of Bede’s usage of *minister* shows that it is really wider than ‘thegn’, and might include aide, attendant and squire (PF Jones 1929, under *minister*).

Returning to the narrative: the nobleman replies to Imma’s confession that he is worthy of death in terms of the blood-feud, because all the brothers and kinsmen of the nobleman had been slain in the battle. The story, however, has a happy ending for Imma, because the nobleman honours his promise that no harm should come to him. Once he had recovered from his wounds, he was sold to a Frisian slave-trader: perhaps a common fate of prisoners of war. Imma’s chains continued to fall off, however, so he was offered

the chance of a ransom. This he was able to raise from King Hlothre, son of his former patroness, Queen Æthelthryth.

Whatever modern readers may make of the miracle element in Bede's account, we may consider that Imma had been a very fortunate young man, in relation both to the generosity of his noble captor, and his own royal patronage. And further, we may be grateful for the insights into the realities of Early Historic warfare which are revealed in this vignette.

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## ARMIES: COMPOSITION & SIZE

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There is much debate about the composition of the armies of the four peoples of northern Britain, in both social and strictly military terms. At the social level, did armies consist wholly of noblemen, the heroes of the praise-poetry; or perhaps of nobles with their personal retainers; or were small numbers of nobles accompanied by larger numbers of non-noble freemen? In military terms, was the Gododdin army wholly one of mounted warriors, who also fought from horseback? Did the warriors of Bernicia occasionally—but only occasionally—go to battle on horseback, but actually fight on foot? Moreover, the social and military aspects, though they may be separated for analytical purposes, were in reality closely interlinked.

An immediate answer to some of these questions may be found in Bede's report of the final clash between Æthelfrith and Rædwald (*HE* ii, 12). Rædwald's victory is attributed in part to the fact that he did not give Æthelfrith time to assemble the whole of his army. Campbell has reasonably suggested that this shows that the army consisted of more than the king's personal retinue of young warriors who were always with him (J Campbell (ed) 1982, 59).

For a fuller answer to these and related questions, however, we will find it necessary, as so often in this study, to make free use of a wide range of contemporary or near-contemporary evidence from all the armies of the north. The evidence will range from passing references in Bede, Stephen and others whose main interests lay far from the battlefield, through contemporary legal texts and other government documents, the high-flown exaggerations of heroic poetry, and pictorial representations with debatable claims to be contemporary.

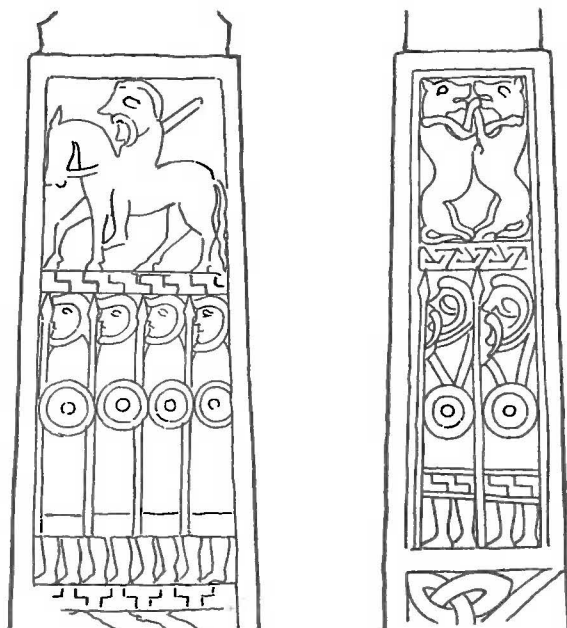
The discussion which follows makes the assumption that the armies in question were more or less evenly matched. For the most part, it was only when a force had travelled far from its home base that a decisive defeat might be inflicted on it. In part this was because no one nation was superior in military technology, either in the sense of the manufacture of arms, or of strategy and tactics. And not merely in technology: in economic and social development, they were all closely similar. They met quite frequently on the field of battle, in shifting alliances and hostilities; and such technical developments as there might have been would quickly have been shared. Consequently, it seems reasonable to extrapolate between nations whenever the evidence is strong for one people and weak for the others.

## 11.1 COMPOSITION OF ARMIES: HORSE AND FOOT

### 11.1.1 Evidence for the Pictish army

One of the clearest statements about the composition of a national army is the military array depicted, in summary, in the early 9th century, on the Dupplin cross (illus 44).

On the main face of the cross there are two military panels. The upper one shows a mounted warrior, distinguished by an impressive moustache; he appears to be armed only with a spear (illus 44, left). In the panel below him are four foot-soldiers armed with spears and small round targes; their lack of moustaches shows that they are young men. On one side of the cross, a panel shows two foot-soldiers with elaborate hangings for their targes; heavy moustaches mark them as older men, and the embroidered hems of their cloaks or tunics also show that they are men of rank (illus 44, right). We see here the three ranks of an army: its commander on horseback; his senior officers on foot; and the body of his army likewise on foot. A contemporary Latin writer might have described these respectively as *rex*; *comites* or *duces*; and *milites*. What we cannot know from the illustration is whether the young men are the clients or retainers of the officers, or whether the relationship is one of an organizational—rather than a personal—nexus. The other immediate point of interest is, of course, that only the king is mounted.



Other pictorial evidence among the Picts is slight. The Aberlemno, Perthshire, church-



yard stele, apparently depicting a conflict or series of actions between the local Picts and the invading Angles, shows both mounted men and foot-soldiers on the Pictish side (illus 45). Moreover, the mounted warriors are obviously fighting from horseback, throwing spears or threatening a fleeing Angle with a sword. We may accept this representation of the riders, despite reservations about the details of the deployment of the infantry. Carvings on later Pictish slabs reinforce the evidence for mixed mounted and foot forces. Thus, on a slab at Dull in Perthshire, six foot-soldiers with round targes on their left flank are followed by two horsemen with spears and

44

Three ranks of soldiers depicted on the Dupplin Cross: the king on horseback; two senior footsoldiers, as shown by their moustaches; and four juniors, as shown by the lack of moustaches (ECMS).

45

The Aberlemno churchyard slab, possibly depicting Angles fleeing or fallen on the right, and Picts on the left (Historic Scotland).

targes. The slab is badly broken, and cannot be used to infer a normal ratio between foot and horse. The great cross-slab known as Sueno's Stone (by Forres, Moray, see below illus 52 and 22.2) also shows mounted troops and companies of infantry.

In default of written sources, we can have no idea of the social composition of the Pictish armies. But two cross-stele may warn us against the ready assumption that noble warriors would necessarily be mounted, or that foot-soldiers would necessarily be base. We have already seen (Prologue above) at Eassie, Angus, that the noble pursuit of the stag may be conducted on foot. On a slab at Kirriemuir (no 2; illus 165 below), a man on foot appears to be hawking—another noble pursuit. And we may recall that among the northern Britons, a man with a retinue of eight slaves may pursue a variety of game animals on foot (Prologue).

### 11.1.2 The Dál Riatan army

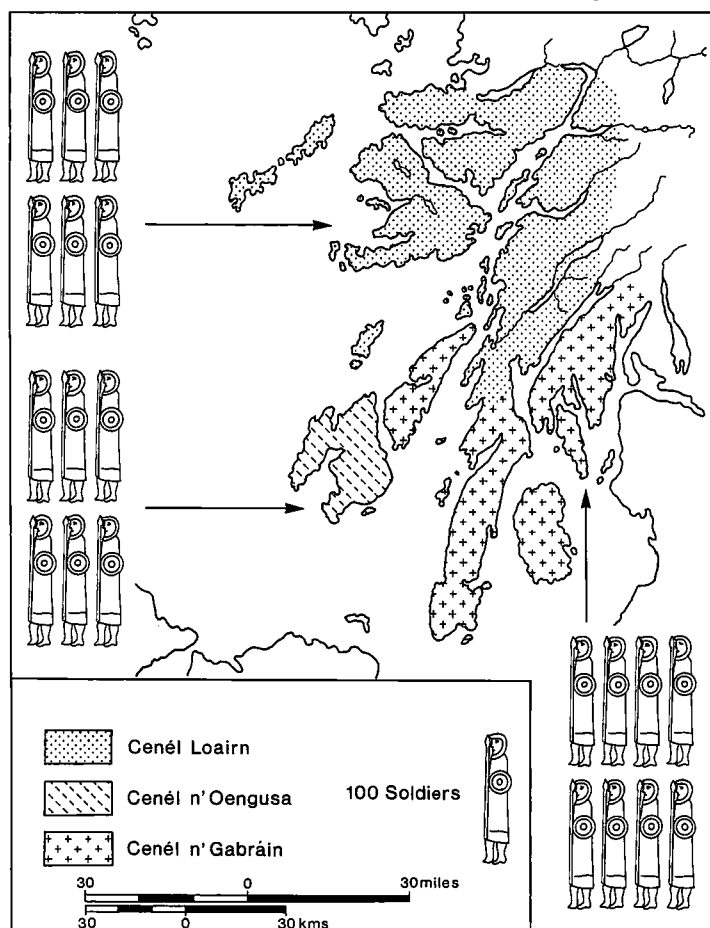
46  
Schematic representation of the muster of foot-soldiers from the three divisions of Dál Riata.

In the case of Dál Riata, two interrelated observations suggest the order of battle of the Dál Riatan army. First, a late 7th-century document, the *Senchus Fer nAlban*, lists the expeditionary force or muster of Dál Riata in terms of men and of ships—but not of horses (illus 46). Second, in a kingdom comprised largely of islands, sea-girt peninsulas, and coastline, which retained strong trans-marine links with Ireland, ships would clearly

have been far more important for mobility than horses. Indeed, given the apparently small size of the ships, with crews of only 14 oarsmen, they would have been rather unsuitable for the transport of horses (illus 47 and 39 above).

### 11.1.3 The army of the Britons

Turning now to the armies of the Britons, we have only the evidence of the heroic praise-poetry to guide us: poetry, that is composed and transmitted in a noble/military milieu in praise of the warriors of the warband, and especially its royal leaders, such as Urien of Rheged and Cadwallon of Gwynedd. In consequence of this (and despite what was just said about game-hunting on foot), the Early Welsh poetry refers almost exclusively to mounted warriors and their steeds and accoutrements. References to infantry are extremely rare, but two examples may be cited. In number five in the canon of Taliesin's poems, a cry coming from the foot-soldiers is heard, apparently heralding the return of Urien from a



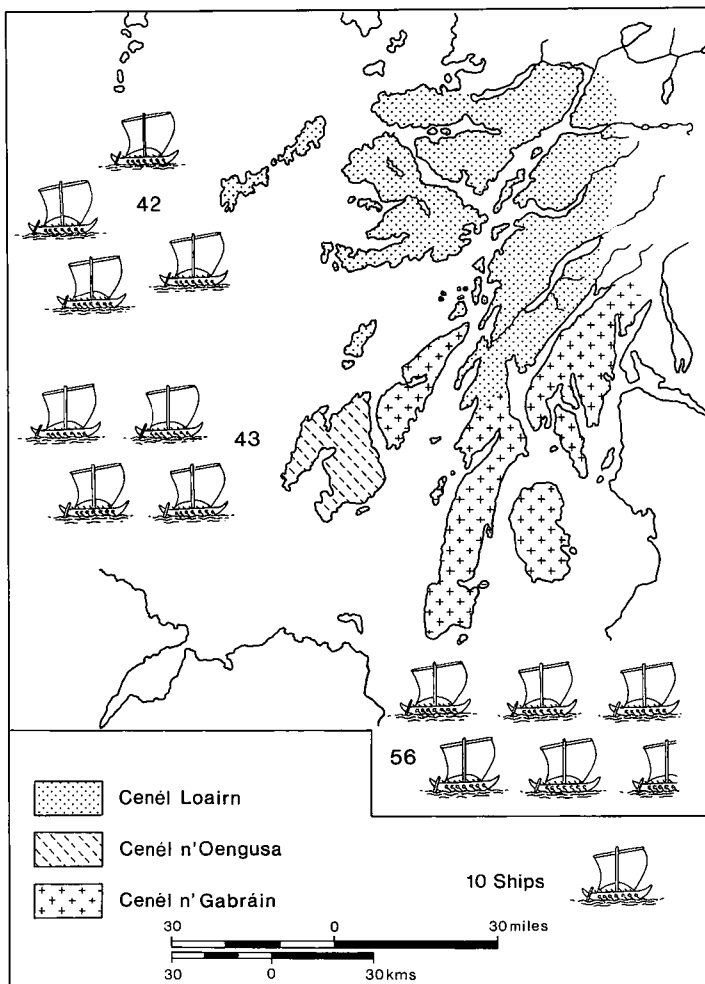
successful expedition. The word *pedyt*, from Latin *pedites*, is quite explicit (Williams & Williams 1968, li; 5; 69). The same word occurs in the Gorchan of Tudfwlch, one of the separate poems included along with *Y Gododdin* in the manuscript known as the Book of Aneirin. Much of the Gorchan of Tudfwlch is obscure to the point of being untranslatable; but relevant to our present concern is the statement that '...to the profit of the infantry, he drove back four hosts...' (Jackson 1969, 154).

In the belief that the supposed Gododdin expeditionary force of 300 or 303 or 363 warriors was a very small one to challenge the military might of Deira (and perhaps Bernicia as well), and faced with the slightness of the evidence for supportive forces, commentators have indulged in various speculations in an attempt to even up the balance, while still allowing an excuse or reason for the wiping out of the heroic 300. These speculations include the belief that the Gododdin army was a cavalry force equipped and trained in the Roman manner; or that the 300 were picked chiefs (indeed the term 'knights' has been used) each with 'a sufficient complement of supporting foot-soldiers'. To this is added the suggestion that the infantry—and possibly dismounted horsemen as well—adopted formations such as squares defended by a wall of shields—this despite the fact that it is impossible to create a shield-wall with round targes no more than 0.6m (2ft) in diameter (discussion in Jackson 1969).

The hard evidence for the composition of the forces of the Britons is indeed quite inadequate for us to reach any soundly-based conclusions. It is necessary first to examine the evidence for the armies of their principal enemies, the Angles; and then to attempt, by comparing all four of the warring nations of northern Britain, to create a valid synthesis.

#### 11.1.4 The Anglian army

So far as the armies of the Northumbrian Angles are concerned, ideas about their composition, in both social and strictly military terms, have been confused by the misinterpretation of two key passages, respectively in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and in Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*. By seeking a proper understanding of these passages, we may



47 Schematic representation of the naval muster of 7-benchers from the three divisions of Dál Riata.

come to appreciate some matters of debate in relation to the forces of Deira and Bernicia; and perhaps even resolve some of the debates.

Bede's miracle story of the Northumbrian warrior Imma (*HE* iv, 22) has already been summarized as a detailed account of what might happen on the battle-field and its aftermath (above 10.7). Here we must consider further the meaning of *miles* as used by Bede. In the standard translation by Colgrave and Mynors (1969, 403), *miles* is translated as 'thegn'. From this has developed the further perception that the army of Ecgrith was a warband of noble warriors: in social terms the equivalent of the Gododdin warband as commonly perceived.

The primary meaning of *miles*, however, is no more than 'soldier, warrior'. It was not until the 10th and later centuries that it came to mean a man-at-arms, mounted warrior, or knight (Niermeyer 1976). In its loosest usage, it may indeed refer to nobles and royal retainers who are also warriors; but in at least two places Bede appears to be making a distinction which we might think of in terms of 'officers and other ranks' (*HE* iii, 22: *comites ac milites*; *HE* iv, 13: *duces ac milites*). It is indeed difficult to see in Bede any sound evidence for the belief that the Northumbrian army was recruited wholly from a warrior aristocracy (*contra*, among others, Alcock 1987a, 263).

Our next concern must be with the military use of horses in Northumbria; and for guidance here we turn to an incident in Ecgrith's military career. Early in his reign the Picts, not surprisingly hostile to Northumbrian claims of overlordship, attempted to throw this off. According to Stephen (*VW*, xix) Ecgrith responded by raising a small mounted force, *equitatu exercitu praeparato*, with which he defeated an enormous host, filling two rivers with their corpses. Our present concern is, why did Ecgrith raise a mounted force, and why did Stephen single this out for mention? These questions must be answered in the light of HM Chadwick's observation that this is the first record of the use of cavalry in English history (Chadwick 1907, 159, n. 1).

It is first necessary to clear away certain misconceptions about the term 'cavalry'. Its primary meaning is 'horse soldiers: a troop of horse or horsemen'. This seems a good rendering of *exercitus equitatus*. There are no overtones here of large war-horses, armoured riders, heavy lances, or the disciplined manoeuvre of the shock attack. No military historian would expect that in the 670s AD an Anglian horseman might have had the benefit of stirrups. All we can immediately infer from Stephen is that Ecgrith, with his brave sub-king Beornheth, took a horse-army to meet the Picts.

Does Stephen mention the mounted force in order to reinforce his comment that the king was 'unacquainted with sluggish enterprises'; in other words, that he was eager to get to grips with the enemy as rapidly as possible? Indeed, since speed is of the essence in crushing a revolt, and on any reckoning the Anglians had some distance to travel to make contact, this was a good strategy—provided that the small, hastily raised army was not overwhelmed by the Pictish tribes, on the analogy of Custer's cavalry at Little Bighorn.

Or did Stephen mention it as something unusual, either in degree, because a Northumbrian army of his day would normally have been a mixture of horse and foot, and the unusual feature was to leave the infantry behind; or unusual in kind because the Anglian army did not normally move on horseback? This second conjecture may be dismissed as ludicrous, simply because the breeding, breaking and training of a troop

of horses for riding was a long-term project. Hence a mounted force could not be got together on the spur of the moment. To this should be added the need to train soldiers, not only in riding, but in the far more serious business of weapon-handling on horseback, without the benefit of saddles and stirrups; and equally important, the accustoming of the horses themselves to the sounds and smells of the battlefield. All these considerations must lead us to believe—especially in view of Ecgrith's victory over a nation of accomplished horsemen—that the Northumbrians also had a fully trained corps of mounted warriors.

At this point, we may ask: was this use of a mounted force unique to the Northumbrians among the other English nations? If this were the case, we may then speculate that the skills of horse-riding and mounted warfare had been learned from the British natives conquered by the Northumbrians (Alcock 1987a, 265). But in 1907, HM Chadwick, in a pregnant footnote, had not only drawn attention to Ecgrith's mounted force, but also added 'it is difficult to believe that Edwin's and Penda's campaigns were carried out on foot'. He then went on to dismiss the statement of Procopius, that horses were unknown to the Angles, as 'doubtless a great exaggeration' (Chadwick 1907, 159, n. 1).

A further issue of dispute has been whether the Angles and other peoples actually fought from horseback, or dismounted to engage the foe (Higham 1991; answered in part by Hooper 1993). The debate has been confused by the introduction of the wholly anachronistic concept of the cavalry lance. It has also failed to address two significant questions: would the decision to fight dismounted depend on whether or not the enemy were foot-soldiers or mounted warriors; and who safeguards the precious horses while battle is joined? But for students of Pictish sculpture the debate has been settled at least since 1985 with the acceptance that the rider on the right-hand side of the Aberlemno churchyard stele is an Anglian king, as his helmet of 'Coppergate' type demonstrates (illus 45). His weapon is certainly not a couched cavalry lance but a light javelin, which contrasts with the thick-shafted pike of a Pictish foot-soldier. It is held overarm, either to be thrown, or to be used with short stabbing motions.

The Aberlemno stone provides no record of Northumbrian infantry, but this may be simply because of the restricted space available. There can scarcely be any doubt that some part of the Northumbrian army—perhaps even the major part—consisted of foot-soldiers; but what proof can be offered for this? Finds of weapons are rare north of the Humber, and even scarcer north of the Tees. There are, however, two significant cemeteries with weapon burials on the north flank of the Tees valley, on the uncertain frontier between Deira and Bernicia, at Greenbank, Darlington, and at Norton. These yielded a total of fourteen or fifteen spearheads. Some of these seem very suitable for javelins, to be thrown from horseback; but others seem too heavy, and indeed unwieldy, for such use, whereas they would have been formidable as infantry pikes.

In addition to this direct, if numerically rare, evidence there is the general belief that, in the armies of nations south of the Humber, a major component would have been infantry. If this were so, especially in the case of Mercia, the most immediate neighbour and enemy of Northumbria, then it would be reasonable to expect a matching infantry component in armies north of the Humber as well.



To sum up the discussion so far: in *Dál Riata*, it seems that the army was one composed

entirely of foot-soldiers. This seems very appropriate for the terrain, and agrees with the late 7th-century account of the expeditionary strength or hosting of the three kindreds of Dál Riata. By contrast, both the Picts and the Northumbrian Angles took the field with a mixed force of horse and foot-soldiers. Among the Britons there is only the slightest evidence for the use of infantry; but since our perceptions are formed entirely on the basis of the aristocratic praise-poetry, we should give considerable weight to Taliesin's reference to infantry. Moreover, it may be expected that military contacts with both Picts and Angles would have led the Britons also to muster a mixed force of horse and foot.

## 11.2 SIZE OF ARMIES

If we now seek to estimate the actual size of the armies of the four nations, we immediately encounter two general problems. The first has long been acknowledged by military historians of better-documented periods. Once contemporary muster rolls, records of payments to commanders and troops, and other such documents become available in the late Middle Ages, it is immediately apparent that chronicles, and even eye-witness accounts, frequently—indeed perhaps normally—exaggerated the numbers of combatants and casualties.

The second problem is perhaps more special to the period of this study. In the writings of Bede and Stephen, for instance, it is normal for the writer's hero to lead a tiny but brave force against an overwhelming host of barbaric and vicious tribes who were either pagan, or what for Bede was even worse, infidel or apostate: that is to say, Christians who celebrated Easter at the wrong phase of the moon. Modern historians seem surprisingly loth to treat these claims of grossly unbalanced odds as blatant propaganda rather than sober fact.

### 11.2.1 The size of the Dál Riata army

The most useful guide to the size of a contemporary army comes from Dál Riata, in the form of a document known as *Senchus Fer nAlban*, History of the Men of Scotland (Bannerman 1974, 27-157). As we have it, the *Senchus* is a copy made in the 10th century, but internal evidence argues for an original of the 7th century. More specifically, a date a little after AD 685 may be suggested, when, as a result of Ecgrith's defeat at Nechtansmere, the *Scotti* regained their freedom (*HE* iv, 26).

The *Senchus* comprises a pseudo-history or ancestor legend of the colonization of Argyll from northern Ireland; a series of dynastic genealogies; and a civil, military and naval survey of Dál Riata. No great historical credibility attaches to the ancestor legend and genealogies, which are essentially intended to explain and legitimate the dynastic situation in Dál Riata towards the end of the 7th century. On the other hand, there would have been no point in compiling the survey unless it had established fairly accurately the taxable and man-power resources of Dál Riata. Belief in its essential credibility is not totally undermined by certain internal discrepancies noted by the principal commentators (MO Anderson 1980, 158-60; Bannerman 1974, 132-54). Indeed, such belief underlies the following discussion.

Dál Riata as a whole was divided between the three kindreds of Loairn, nOengusa and nGabráin. For each kindred, the survey recorded the numbers of a unit known as a *tech*,

literally 'house'; the total expeditionary strength of each kindred; and then allocates 'two seven-benchers [ie ships] to every twenty houses in a sea expedition' (illus 47). It is reasonably assumed that a seven-benchers had a crew of 14 rowers and a steersman, giving a total complement of 15. (Presumably each vessel also had a skipper, who would have been a potentate of lesser or greater rank, but who may not have been counted in totals for a hosting). The actual figures for a land-hosting are corrupt, but on the reasonable assumption that the rowers fought also on land, it is possible to allocate 840 warriors to the hosting of nGabraín, 645 to nOengusa, and 630 to Loairn. It seems that these figures were rounded down into notional units of hundreds (illus 46). As a measure of corroboration, Bannerman points out that 800 was the notional size of an Irish royal hosting (1974, 147).

The total armed muster of Dál Riata would, then, amount to about 2000 men. What proportion of the total population might this have been? We have no direct evidence for the population of northern Britain or any part of it during the period of this study, nor indeed until a millennium later. In 1755, however, before the major changes wrought by emigration and industrialization, Alexander Webster, 'one of the ministers of Edinburgh', attempted to compile an account of the number of people in Scotland. His results as such are not relevant here; but what is very relevant is that he included, as the final column of his figures, the number of fighting men in each parish. This he arrived at not on the basis of observation, but on the belief that he 'supposed the Fighting Men...to be only one fifth part of the numbers of the inhabitants'. If we apply this ratio to the Dál Riata figures, on the basis that 18th-century Scotland was scarcely more peaceful than 7th-century Dál Riata, then we arrive a population of around 10,000-11,000 (Alcock 1997).

A rough check can be made on this figure if we make the assumption that each of the three dynastic kindreds of Dál Riata was the equivalent of the *tuath*, 'tribe' or 'petty kingdom' of the Irish Laws. Kelly has suggested that 'the average *tuath* could be reckoned to have contained about 3000 men, women and children' (Kelly 1988, 4). This would suggest a round figure of 9000 for Dál Riata; and given the character of these speculations, that would be reasonably consistent with the figure derived from Webster. Its implication—for the 7th century as much as for the 18th—is that every able-bodied adult male (that is, between say 14 and 45 years of age) should be regarded as a potential warrior.

### 11.2.2 Calculating the size of the army of the Britons, Picts and Angles

#### The army of the Britons

We may now continue on this speculative road—for we have none other to follow—by suggesting that similar calculations may be made for the Brythonic-speaking peoples of northern Britain, on the grounds that they had Celtic roots comparable to those of the Irish, and were at a comparable stage of social development. We may then ask, was Gododdin the equivalent of a *tuath*, albeit rather a large one? If so, the Catraeth expedition may have numbered more than 800: and perhaps even more when the additions from Gwynedd and elsewhere, mentioned in the poem, are included. Indeed, if we consider that the Gododdin controlled a larger area of good quality land than did Dál Riata, a hosting of 2000 might have been possible. Such figures have more to commend themselves than the 'poetic' figures of 303 or 363.

### Estimates of the Pictish army

And what may we estimate for Pictland south of the Mounth? From south to north, we might recognize the following five units: Manau (or Miathi), Fib, Fortrenn, Fotla and Circinn (modifying Wainwright 1955b, 46-7; other discussion in Henderson 1975a, 8-9 with map 7, but modified in Henderson 1996, 52). If we were to equate each of these units with an Irish *tuath*, then we might think in terms of a combined military power between 3000 and 4000. However, with the exception of Manau, the other four all have double names in the (admittedly late) document *De situ Albanie* (text, MO Anderson 1980, 240-2; discussion by Wainwright and Henderson, as above); so perhaps this implies a total of nine relatively small units, each with an expeditionary force of around 650: the grand total might then approach 6000.

### The size of the Anglian armies

These speculations have been based on supposed parallels in social arrangements among the Celtic peoples of north Britain. When we turn to the Anglian, Germanic elements in the region, however, we must seek quite different sources of evidence. In the case of Bernicia, indeed, the matter is not quite so simple. Although the Anglian king Edwin had a power centre at Yeavinger, only about seven miles south of the Tweed, there is good reason to believe that this, and other Bernician centres at Bamburgh, Lindisfarne, and Dunbar, and possibly St Abb's Head (Coludesburh) as well, were all based on preceding British (presumably Gododdin) power bases. This then leads to the possibility that the complete military, economic and social system of Gododdin had been taken over by the Angles.

Putting this consideration aside, and turning to the system known throughout England south of Northumbria, the basic document is a 7th-century survey, the Tribal Hidage (major discussion in Davies & Vierck 1974; facsimile text, Dumville 1989). In simple terms, this assesses the individual kingdoms and sub-kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons in terms of a unit known as a 'hide'. In later centuries, units of five hides each supplied a man for the army; so the survey can be used to calculate the military strength of individual kingdoms. Unfortunately for our present purposes, the survey does not extend to Northumbria itself, despite the fact that Bede clearly knew of the hidage system of assessment. Indeed, he quotes the hidage of Anglesey (960 hides) and Man (300 hides), and even of Iona (5 hides). The Anglesey information possibly derives from the time when Edwin claimed hegemony over Gwynedd.

In default of an assessment for Northumbria, it is instructive to look at those for adjacent kingdoms. The two nearest were indeed tiny: the former British kingdom of Elmet in the southern Pennines, at 600 hides; and the land of the Peak-settlers, in the White Peak of Derbyshire, at 1200 hides. But for Northumbria, the most important neighbour—and constant rival—was of course Mercia, sometime ally of Cadwallon in the overthrow of Edwin: it represented no less than 30,000 hides (diagrammatic presentation in Davies & Vierck 1974, fig 3). On the formula given above, this implies a military potential of 6000 men. Given that despite several defeats, Northumbria succeeded in keeping Mercia at bay, and that it was the Picts who effectively checked Northumbria's claim to a wide hegemony in AD 685, we may surmise that the combined force of Deira and Bernicia cannot have been far short of that same figure.

Parenthetically, if the figures quoted in the preceding paragraphs seem unexpectedly,

or even unacceptably, high, we might consider a possible estimate for the host which besieged and ultimately destroyed *Alt Clut*, Dumbarton Rock, in AD 870, as a prelude to a great slave-raid in southern Scotland and northern England. The expedition, led from Dublin by two kings of the Northmen, involved 200 ships, according to the Annals of Ulster. Estimates for the complement of Viking raiding ships range from 26–30 for Skuldelev 5, to 50–60 for Skuldelev 2 (McGrail 1980, 49), so a force of over 5000, and perhaps even double that, may have been involved. (I owe this line of reasoning to Brooks 1979).

### 11.3 MILITARY ORGANISATION

Returning to the main discussion: the *Senchus Fer nAlban* and the Tribal Hidage give us a broad picture of the assessment of much of Britain for tribute and military service. The *Senchus* also provides some evidence as to how troops could in practice be mustered in units under designated leaders. The civil survey of the Cenél Loairn contains part of a list of 'septs', with named leaders (Bannerman 1974, 130–47). To each leader is allocated a number of *tech*-units. The allocations are in terms of 5, 10, 15, 20 and 30 'houses', suggesting (on Irish analogies) that the sept-leaders represent five grades of nobility, whereas the 'houses' represent groups of base-clients, the lowest grade of free retainers, tenants or followers.

Because of gaps in the text of the *Senchus*, it is not completely certain how many men were mustered by the individual 'house'. We can, however, make a calculation based on the naval muster, which required 20 'houses' to provide two 'seven-benchers': that is, with 14 oarsmen, a skipper and a steersman, giving a figure which may be averaged out at 1.6 per 'house'. For the septs detailed in the survey, this would give figures of 8, 16, 24, 32 and 48. This was presumably the notional number of freemen which each sept leader took to the hosting.

In a wider context, the distinction between the leader and the retainers who make up the body of the sept seems to reflect Bede's apparent distinction between *comites/duces* and *milites*. Abels's discussion (1988) of lordship and military obligation in Anglo-Saxon England is also relevant here. Firstly, he has no doubt that the military obligations of non-noble peasants—so-called 'fyrd-service'—extended from Wessex to Mercia and Northumbria. Secondly, however, he appears to see the obligation as attaching essentially to the retainers of nobles. This agrees broadly with the arrangements in Dál Riata. This may encourage us, in default of evidence to the contrary, to believe that a similar system would have obtained among the Britons and Picts as well.

One other numerical calculation may be suggested. We may use the floor areas of the Great Halls at the royal centre of Yeavering to assess their seating capacity. Leaving reasonable elbow-room for feasting and drinking, the maximum seating would have been no more than 120 to 150. In comparison with the figures suggested for a hosting, it would seem that the feasting companions of a king formed a very select band indeed.

### 11.4 WAR-BANDS: THE VOLUNTARY ELEMENT

At this point, however, we must face a major problem: how do we reconcile the tight system of musters of the *Senchus* with the apparently voluntary character of a warband

as depicted in the Welsh praise-poetry and the *Beowulf*-epic? If a hosting was raised on the basis of numbers of men and ships allocated to *tech*-units, whence came the young men eager for excitement, glory, mead, jewellery and other rewards? The answer must lie in the existence of younger sons of the leaders of *septs*, as well as exiles and others of royal and noble stock who had been dispossessed.

There is good anecdotal evidence for such foot-loose, glory-seeking young nobles. Guthlac, despite an exemplary childhood, at the age of 15 remembered the deeds of ancient heroes of his race, and with the love of mastery burning in his breast, gathered bands of followers and turned to arms. In more direct terms, he became a bandit-chief, devastating settlements and gathering a great booty (*VG*, xvi & xvii). This part of his career lasted for nine years, before he repented and turned to the religious life.

A briefer incident is related, as part of a miracle-story, by Stephen (*VW*, 67). His particular interest was that a group of noble exiles had burned the monastery at Oundle but almost buried in this incident is the wider fact that they were engaged in ravaging with an armed band, *cum exercitu...spoliantes*. In these two cases, we see men excluded from the normal working of the host-raising system, seeking glory and profit in predation, simple and unadorned: as opposed, that is, to the socially acceptable and poetically glorified predation of a royal hosting for the taking of tribute or plunder.

A more ambiguous case in terms of social acceptability is that of the atheling Cyneheard (*ASC* s.a., 757). His brother Sigebert had been dispossessed of the kingdom of Wessex by Cynewulf. After Sigebert's death, Cynewulf wished to expel Cyneheard, who incidentally had a respectable family-tree in the Wessex dynasty. Cyneheard and his own band of followers took advantage of a weak moment to slay Cynewulf and his immediate companions; but Cyneheard and his band were in turn slain by a larger body of the king's thegns. Had Cyneheard triumphed, an unsuccessful intra-dynastic revolt would have become the restitution of a legitimate heir.

These three instances are presented to illustrate the actual openness and flexibility within noble military society, in contrast to the apparent inflexibility of the *Senchus Fer nAlban*. In particular, they reveal the existence of men eager for both subjective and objective rewards, but with no fixed place in the organization of the hosting, whether because they were younger sons or were exiles. Here was a fruitful ground for recruiting additional troops. Guthlac might have taken his sword to a neighbouring king, had it not been for his personal desire for leadership. Stephen's exiles could have found service in the war-band of the king of a rival kingdom, and could have used this as the base for a challenge for their own throne.

Indeed, the cultivation of exiles from a neighbouring kingdom was a major politico-military stratagem of kingship, which can be illustrated from numerous incidents in the *Ecclesiastical History*. A good instance can be inferred (though it is not stated explicitly), from the victorious return of Oswald and the consequent overthrow of Cadwallon. During Edwin's reign, the dispossessed sons of his predecessor Æthelfrith, together with a large number of young nobles, were in exile in Dál Riata (*HE* iii, 1-3). On Edwin's death, they were allowed to return to their own land, the eldest son, Eanfrith becoming king of Bernicia. He was shortly killed, however, whereupon Oswald appeared with a small army and overthrew Cadwallon). Bede's expression *cum parvo exercitu*, 'with a small force', need mean no more than a personal war-band, though the subsequent defeat of the formidable Cadwallon argues for a considerably larger army. (It may,

however, be no more than a *topos* of heroic/religious literature). However that might be, there can be no doubt that the core of Oswald's 'small force' was a war-band initially recruited from his fellow exiles, and probably supplemented by some younger sons of Dál Riata looking for adventure and plunder.

One further implication arises from this discussion of the free, unstructured elements in the noble military society. The military and naval surveys of the *Senchus* give us only the minimal figures for a hosting. A militarily-successful ruler might have added an unknown, but probably large, number of volunteers.

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## WEAPONS AND WEAPON-PLAY

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### 12.1 WEAPONS AND ARMOUR

#### 12.1.1 Occurrence and depiction

The most abundant evidence for weapons in Early Historic Britain comes from furnished male graves: that is to say, burials with weapons. In the past it has been customary, firstly, to assume that the suite of weapons in a grave represented the arms likely to have been used in battle by the dead person, so that the grave was literally a warrior-grave. Secondly, social implications might be read into such burials; for instance, there appeared to be a graded system from graves containing no more than a knife, through those with a spear and shield, to those with a sword as well, and finally to graves with much jewellery in addition to a full suite of weapons. Especially in southern England the spear-graves were regarded as those of *ceorls* or warrior-peasants; the presence of a sword marked noble or thegnly status, while the very rich graves were those of kings.

Recent analysis of the correlation in Anglo-Saxon graves between suites of weapons and the physical character of the associated bodies has, however, demonstrated that an abundance of weapons was not necessarily related to the ability to fight with them. Moreover, the actual combinations of weapons were sometimes impractical for use in battle. This, together with other detailed analyses, has cast doubt on the interpretation of furnished graves in overtly martial terms as ‘warrior-graves’ (Härke 1989; 1990). Moreover, the scheme of social status outlined above is seen as probably too simple. In particular, though it may reflect the situation in Wessex, in other parts of England there is no clear correlation. Despite this, Härke concludes that the richness or otherwise of the weapons in a grave did reflect, in a symbolic way, the status, and perhaps especially the wealth, of the family of the dead person.

It should indeed come as no surprise that a display of weapons—even in the process of consigning them to a grave—should also be a display of rank. When the flamboyant future bishop Wilfrid decided to seek the Kingdom of Heaven, he obtained weapons, horses and garments fit for himself and his companions to stand in the royal presence: actually the earthly presence of queen Eanfled, wife of king Oswiu (*VW*, 2). The humble Cuthbert, when he decided to enter the abbey at Melrose, went mounted and armed, as we know because Bede relates that he handed over his horse and spear to an abbey servant (*VCB*, 6). Even if we regard these statements as no more than the pious assumptions of a biographer, they clearly reflect contemporary social expectations.

We may conclude from these two examples that a depiction of a mounted man carrying a sword, spear and targe does not necessarily imply a warrior off to battle: he may well be a gentleman dressed for a social visit. The apogee of this social practice may be seen in JM Wright’s well-known 17th-century portrait of ‘The Highland Chieftain’, a fitting

representative of the final stages of the social system which had its roots in northern Britain in Early Historic and even earlier periods. The chieftain is armed with a flintlock sporting gun, two pistols, a basket-sword and a dirk. In contemporary terms, he was regarded as 'a Highland laird in his proper habit' (Stevenson 1981, fig 191; Stevenson & Thomson 1982, 91-2).

We might further conclude that marked local variations in weapon burials were governed, not by richness or poverty in arms, but rather by regional differences (perhaps even partly determined by ethnic differences) in ritual practices. Such variations are of particular relevance to the present study. In broad terms, weapon burials are most prominent in areas of early Saxon settlement, and not at all common in the Anglian areas of middle and northern England. They only become relatively common in the north of Britain as a result of Scandinavian incursion and settlement from the late 8th century onwards. In Anglian Northumbria in the 6th century, furnished graves are especially rare in the northern sub-kingdom of Bernicia (Miket 1980). If we take the Tees as marking the ill-defined border-zone between Deira and Bernicia, then the only significant cemetery was, until recently, one of a mere six burials at Darlington (Miket & Pocock 1976). In 1992, however, a cemetery with 120 burials, including ten with weapons, was published from Norton, Cleveland, on the northern slopes of the Tees valley (Sherlock & Welch 1992).

Among the Celtic nations, weapons are normally only found on defended or quasi-defended sites, such as the forts at Dunadd and Dunollie, and the crannog at Buiston. Our best knowledge of Celtic weapons comes from the Pictish carved stones of the 8th and 9th centuries. As we shall see, the interpretation of these brings problems of its own.

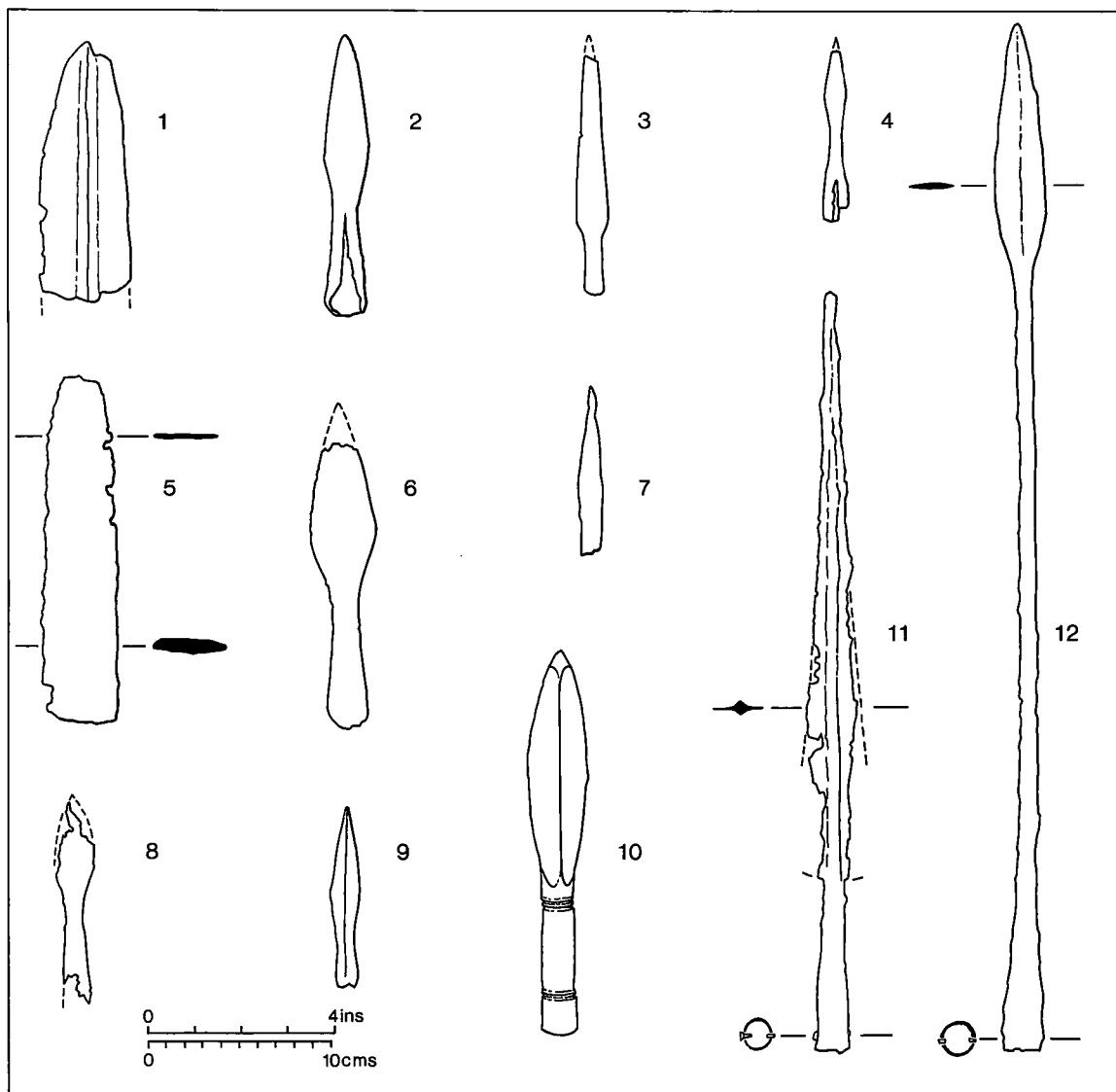
The available evidence can now be examined by type of weapon.

#### 12.1.2 Swords (illus 48; 52)

Anglo-Saxon swords, well known from graves in southern England, were typically double-edged, often up to 0.9m (36 in) long; ideal stabbing and especially slashing weapons, for hand-to-hand fighting on foot (typical illustrations collected in Alcock 1989, fig 28; discussion by Hawkes 1989, 1-9; Bone 1989, 63-70). In Deira, weapons of comparable size have been reported from Acklam Wold and Kirkburn (Meaney 1964). Two Bernician examples from Darlington are now lost, and we have no measurements from them. From Bernicia north of the Tweed, a garnet-and-gold filigree pyramid from a sword harness hints at a royal weapon burial, but no associated finds are recorded to back this up (Dickinson 1974, n 101: illus in Alcock 1993, fig 15).

Among the Celtic peoples of northern Britain, the only material evidence for swords is from Dunadd: two fragments of blades, which taper towards rather blunt tips: one also has a pronounced mid-rib (Craw 1930, 118; Duncan 1980, fig 7). In this it resembles some possibly contemporary swords from the Irish crannogs at Lagore and Ballinderry 2 (illustrations and ref: Alcock 1971; 1989). Given the Irish roots of the *Scotti* such comparisons are to be expected.

The most abundant evidence for swords in the north comes indeed from the Pictish carvings. Because some stones are severely weathered, it is not possible to cite exact numbers; but on the Class II stones (principally cross-slabs displaying Pictish symbols and scenes) out of some 55 riders, 36% carry spears, a mere 7% also bear targets, while



48  
Swords and  
spearheads:  
fragmentary sword  
blades (1, 5) from  
Dunadd;  
spearheads from  
Dunadd (2, 3, 4,  
6, 7, 8, 9), Buiston  
(10) and Four  
Crosses (11 & 12).

16% have swords as well. For the Class III stones (cross-slabs with no symbols appearing), the figures are 26 riders, 50% with spears, 38% also with targes, and 27% with swords as well. These may seem very high ratios of swords to spears, but it must be borne in mind that the carvings are unlikely to present us with a cross-section of society. On the contrary, the sword-bearers probably belonged to the most powerful and wealthiest rank, for who else could have afforded to set up elaborate carved monuments?

If we assume that the carvings are reasonably accurate—and we have no actual relics whereby this assumption might be checked—then the swords were double-edged, parallel-sided, and with a rather blunt tip. There are wide hilt-guards, and a parallel guard at the butt end of the hilt, but no prominent pommel. Presumably the hand-grip would have been of wood or bone. When riding, the sword is carried in a scabbard,

which can sometimes be seen to end in a crescentic or U-shaped chape. Making further assumptions about the accuracy of the carvings, especially on the Aberlemno kirkyard stone, the overall length of the Pictish sword—that is to say, including the hilt—appears to have been about 0.50–0.55m (20–22 in); that is, about the length of the Irish sword from Ballinderry crannog No 2, and markedly shorter than Anglo-Saxon swords. This would suggest that it was intended as a one-handed stabbing weapon, rather than for two-handed slashing.

### 12.1.3 Spears

(illus 48, 2-4 & 6-12; 49, 1-8)

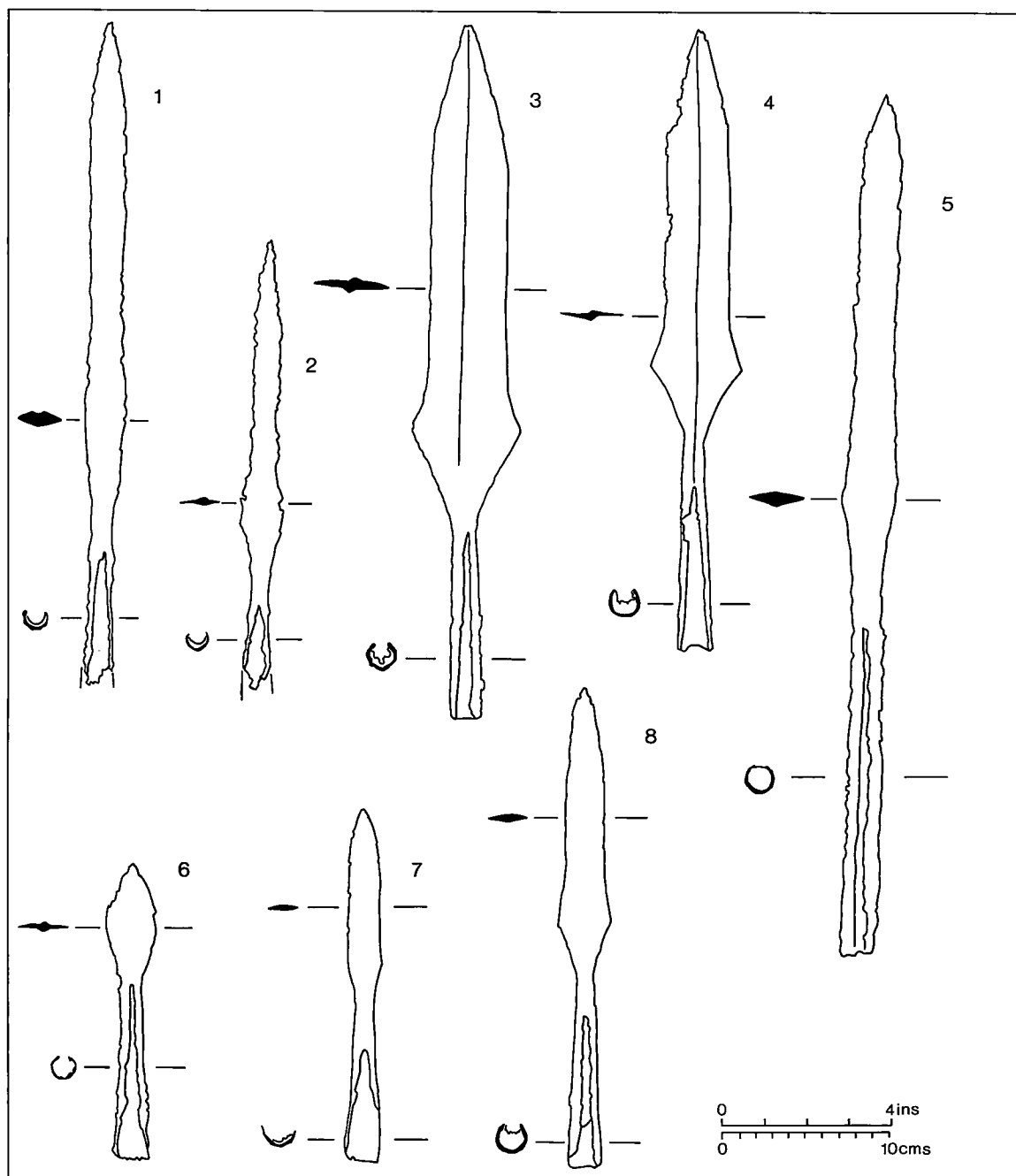
#### Anglian

Despite some regional differences in the ratio of spears to swords in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, the frequency of discoveries of iron spearheads makes it plain that the spear was the commonest weapon throughout Britain in our period. The simple term spearhead, however, embraces a great range in size, and a wide variety of blade-forms, around the basic theme of blades with (normally) a pointed tip, parallel-sided or more-or-less elongated leaf-shaped, and with a socket which may be welded in a complete circle, or may be split. These differences in form and size suggest different functions, but there has been little discussion of these (for detailed typology, chronology and tribal affiliations see Swanton, 1973; 1974; Hills 1976).

Variation in size is well demonstrated in the small Bernician cemetery at Darlington (Miket & Pocock 1976) where three spearheads, all with the basic elongated leaf-shaped blade, vary in overall length from 0.4m (16in) down to 0.27m (10.5in). The actual blade of the largest is 0.28m (11 in) long. But this formidable weapon appears insignificant compared with that from grave 64 at Norton: 0.51m (20in) overall, with a blade of 0.3m (12 in), but less than 30mm (1.2 in) wide for most of its length. In striking contrast at Norton is a pointed oval blade only 0.17m (7in) overall from grave 12; the socket occupies almost two-thirds of the overall length. Grave 60 had a blade with a slightly angular shoulder, only 0.18m overall, but also with a long socket.

Two other Norton spearheads, respectively from graves 34 and 55, deserve special mention because of their sheer ferociousness. From the top of the socket both splay out to angular shoulders; from the shoulder to the tip the blade may best be described as ogival, though it is unclear whether this was their original form as forged, or is the result of frequent whetting of the blades. The cross-section of that from grave 34 (and possibly, though badly corroded, that from 55 as well) is 'stepped': that is, it presents two thin blades slightly off-set either side of a stout mid-rib. The most striking feature of these two weapons is their size: that from grave 34 is 0.37m (14.5in) overall, with a width at shoulder of 55mm (2in) and shoulder to tip 0.21m (8in); from grave 55, 0.42m (16.5in) overall, with width at shoulder 70mm (3in) and shoulder to tip 0.25m (10in).

The distinctive character of these two weapons, and the contrast with the other seven (or possibly eight) spears from a single cemetery prompts us to speculate on the battlefield use of such weapons. To anticipate a fuller discussion below, spears might be thrown by a foot-soldier, or from horseback, that is, as javelins; they might be used from horseback with a jabbing motion (but not in our period as true lances); on foot, they might be used for thrusting, that is, as pikes. Some of the smaller spearheads from Norton might well have been used for throwing or jabbing from horseback; but the large ones,



49  
Spearheads from  
Darlington (1-2)  
and Norton (3-8).

together with those from Darlington, seem far too unwieldy to be handled by a horseman. They may reasonably be regarded as pikes. This may also have been one function of the weapons from Norton graves 34 and 55, but such an explanation does no justice to their formidable cutting edges, which seems designed for slashing or chopping in the manner of later bills or Lochaber axes (on the latter, Caldwell 1981b).

## Celtic and British spears

Turning now to the evidence for spears among the northern Celtic peoples: among the Scots, the greatest assemblage so far recovered is from Dunadd, where there are at least eight, ranging in length from 95-180mm (4-7in). Most of them have leaf-shaped blades, with either split or closed sockets. The blades mostly have a narrow cross-section, but two have a strong triangular section. The only recorded spear of the Northern Britons, that from Buiston (Munro 1882, fig 233), also has a leaf-shaped blade, with a mid-rib. Among the Picts, as has already been noticed, depictions of spears are common, and are normally interpreted as javelins to be thrown from horseback, though this may be disputed (see below). Occasionally they also appear as pikes for foot-soldiers. The javelin:pike ratio reflects the social bias of the evidence, derived as it is from the carved stones.

Finally in this review of spears, mention must be made of two remarkable iron spear-heads from north-east Wales, more probably from ancient Powys rather than Gwynedd. These weapons were found by accident, high in the silted-up ditch of a long-abandoned barrow during the excavation of a group of such barrows at Four Crosses near Llandysilio, Powys. Presumably they had originally furnished a warrior grave, but there were no traces of a body (Warrilow *et al* 1986, 57-61).

One was the head of a lance or pike, distinguished by its length (at least 0.55m (22in)), its shape and the pronounced mid-rib of the blade, as well as by its closed socket. The other was a javelin, 0.74m (29in) overall. It had a relatively short leaf-shaped blade, with an exceptionally long and slender round shaft ending in a closed socket. The form of this has been compared with the *pilum* of the Roman legionary, which reputedly had a hard-forged head, with a shaft that was soft-forged. The intention of this was that, after the head had pierced an opponent's shield, the soft iron shaft, backed by a heavy wooden handle, would bend and drag the shield down. It was noted that 'part of the shaft...was heavily corroded, possibly resulting from stress where the shaft had been bent and straightened in antiquity' (Barford *et al* 1986, 104).

Weapons similar to the second of the Four Crosses examples are known rarely in Anglo-Saxon graves, and more commonly with Migration-period burials on the Continent, where they are conventionally known as *angons*. Moreover, evidence from the great north German bog-burials has led to the presumption that virtually every man in an army might be furnished with a two-spear set of pike and throwing spear, the latter having the bending property of that from Four Crosses (cited by Hines 1989, 35-6). Such parallels might argue for a Continental source for the Four Crosses pair; but in fact, after a somewhat inconclusive discussion, Barford concluded that derivation from either Insular or Continental Germanic sources is unlikely (Barford *et al* 1986).

In historical terms this would seem to rule out the possibility that these splendid weapons had been wielded by Edwin's soldiery in one of his expansionist incursions into north Wales. Indeed, it has been suggested that the Four Crosses spears were 'probably used by a warrior in 6th-7th century Wales' (Redknap 1991, 28). It is therefore not unreasonable to speculate that such weapons had armed Cadwallon's troops in their attempt to drive out the English.

#### 12.1.4 Axes, daggers and bows (illus 50)

Axes (illus 50, 3 & 7).

In Anglo-Saxon graves in southern England, two types of axe occur: throwing axes of Continental derivation, and hafted axes, essentially woodman's felling axes. These do not occur in the graves of northern England. On the other hand, several Pictish stele show men carrying axes, or even fighting with them in single combat. Mostly the axes are axe-hammers, like that from the 6th-century gate at Cadbury Castle, Somerset (Alcock 1995a, illus 5.4); but one from Golspie (*ECMS*, 48-50), shows a woodman's T-axe, a useful hafted blade for warfare, remote ancestor of some of the Scottish medieval and later warrior's axes (Caldwell 1981b).

While the T-shaped axe, the axe-hammers and the dagger are real enough, and can be matched with known artefacts, a question remains about the figures who wield them: are they human, or are they mythical heroes, wild men of the woods, or even demons? Such doubts are partly inspired by the fact that several of the axe-bearers have ferocious, almost heraldic heads: (for instance, that from Rhynie, Aberdeenshire: Shepherd & Shepherd 1978; here illus 50, 7). The scenes of single combat suggest some legendary or mythical battle. Moreover, the Golspie warrior with his dagger and T-axe has a formal, unnatural stance, and confronts a heraldic lion, very probably derived from a tapestry of ultimate Near Eastern origin. Could the warrior himself be derived from a Persian hero-king, with his weapons suitably modified to meet Pictish taste? One thing can be said for certain about the Golspie warrior: he knew how to handle a knife for in-fighting.

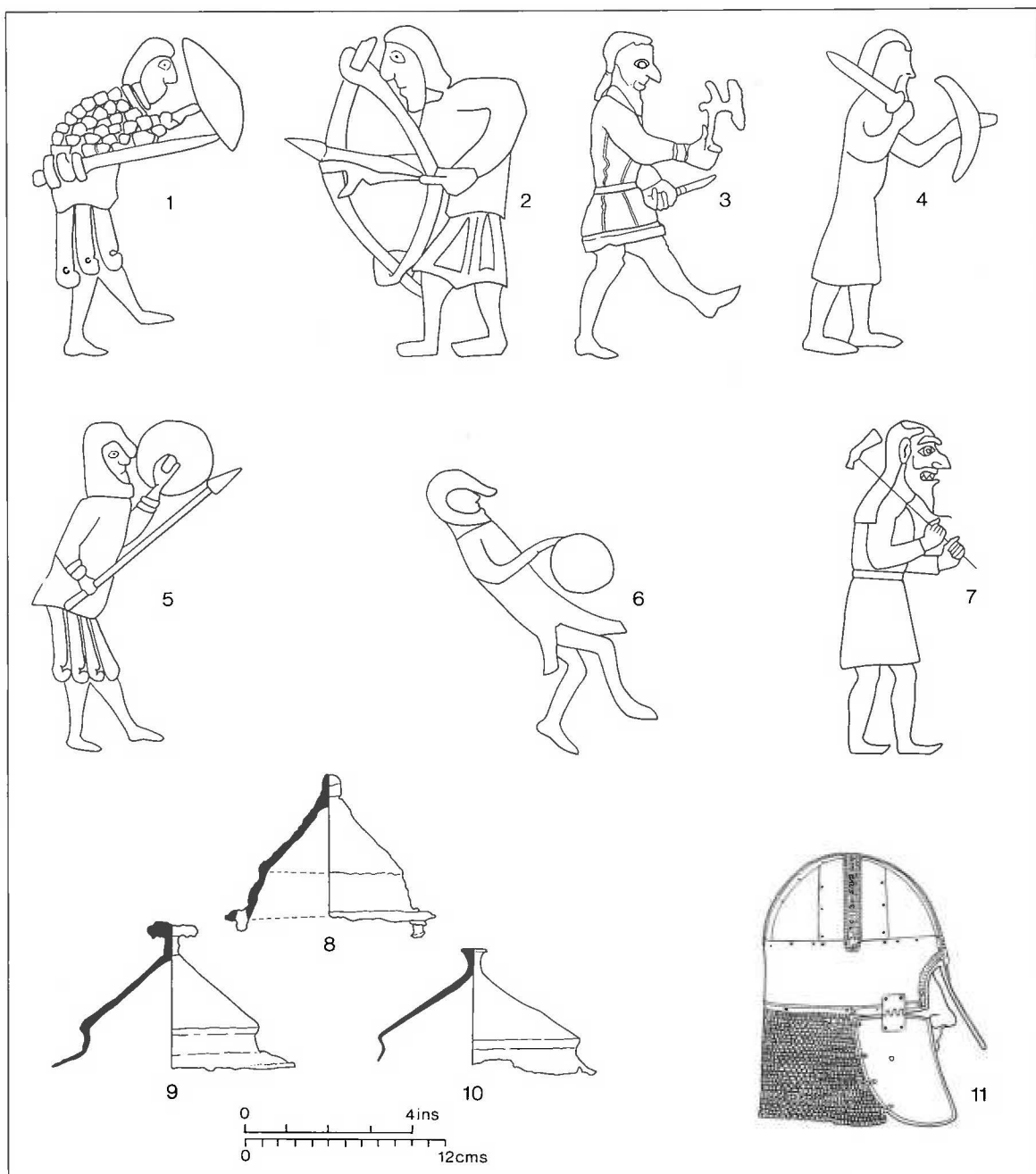
Daggers and knives (illus 50, 3)

The Golspie figure carries in his left hand a knife with a straight back and a cutting edge which curves gently up to a point: in effect, a single-edged dagger. The length, including the handle appears to be about 0.3m (12in). In terms of size, this compares well with a type of Anglo-Saxon single-edged knife, known customarily as a *seax*. In these, however, the back, rather than the blade, is often curved (Gale 1989). Both the *seax* and the Golspie dagger would make excellent close-quarter stabbing weapons. The suggestion has even been made that the *seax* 'would be useful for finishing a...deer'; but this reveals some ignorance of that beast: a stag with a 'royal' head of antlers could oppose 24 dagger-like points to a huntsman's single dagger.

Bows and arrows (illus 50, 2; 51)

Two types of archers and their bows from northern Britain are presented here. The first, from a Northumbrian whalebone casket (the Franks casket, below 22.3.2), shows a warrior named Egil defending his hall and his wife with a simple bow and arrows. Allowing for the difficult material, the carver has produced a readily acceptable image of both the archer and the weapon.

The second type appears to be an early form of crossbow. Allen, in the general list of his archaeological survey of the ornamental designs sculpted on the Pictish monuments (*ECMS*, Vol I, 408) lists four 'archers with peaked hood and cross-bow: Shandwick, Glenferness, St Vigeans No 1 and Meigle No 10'. Of these, the Vigean's example,

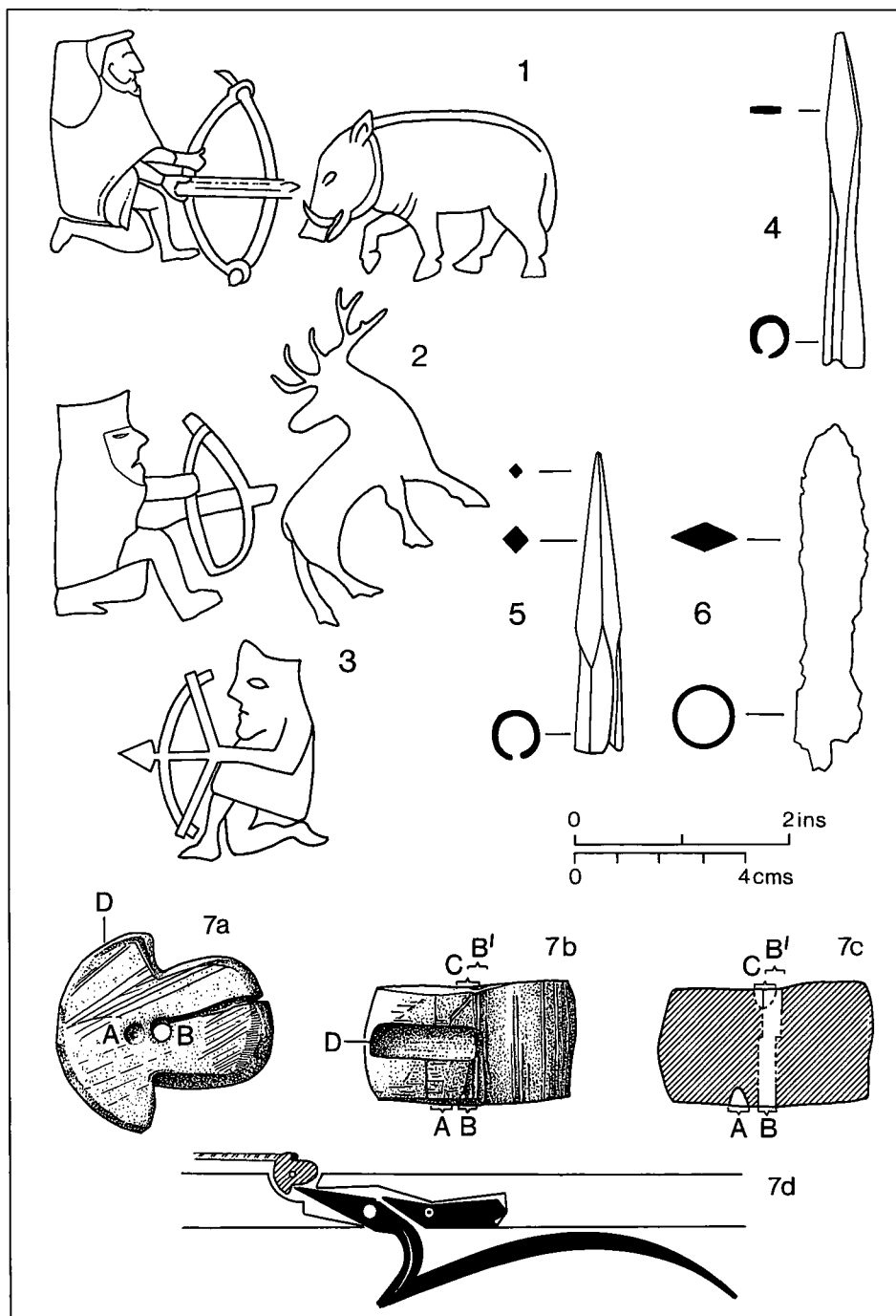


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## Miscellaneous weapons and armour.

Representations of axes on stones at Golspie (3) and Rhynie No 7 (7); daggers and knives from Golspie (3); bow & arrow shown by Egil on the Franks Casket (2); shields from the Franks Casket (1, 5) and Aberlemno (churchyard) stone (4, 6); shield bosses from Norton (8-10) and helmet from York (11).

51  
Pictish archers and  
their equipment.  
Archers in action:  
from St Vigean  
(1), Shandwick (2)  
and Glenfernes  
(3); iron crossbow  
bolts from Buiston  
(4-5) and Norton  
(6); three views of  
an antler trigger  
nut for a crossbow  
from Buiston (7a-  
c) and conjectural  
cut-away view  
of the trigger  
mechanism (7d).



depicting an archer ambushing a boar (illus 51, 1), is by far the most revealing because of the relative crispness of the carving (*ECMS*, Vol II, fig 250B). It must be stressed, however, that the overall scene of the encounter of archer and boar is seriously condensed to fit the width of the cross-slab: as it appears, even if the boar were fatally

wounded, its sheer momentum would over-run the archer, to his serious—if not fatal—wounding.

Of Allen's list, Meigle No 10 may be dismissed as simplified, but the other three share several revealing characteristics: the archers are all cloaked and cowed; they all kneel on one knee, and none of them grasps the bow itself. As for the garment, and the kneeling posture: these suggest that the archers are all in a concealed position—in short, an ambush. The prey at Shandwick is a stag, while that at St Vigean, as already stated, is a boar with a vicious tusk.

The absence of a forward hand on the bow immediately rules out a simple bow. The details at Shandwick, and even better at St Vigean, show a parallel-sided piece (presumably of wood) which runs horizontal from one hand of the archer, and protrudes beyond the bow itself. This may be identified as the bow-stock. At St Vigean it is just possible to discern an arrow-shaft, with a diamond-shaped arrow-head to the front (Macaulay 1996, figs 1 and 2).

At this point it is necessary to accept a visual distortion resulting from the constricted field available to the carver. Both the bow itself and the arrow-bearing face of the bow-stock should of course be horizontal, but the carver can only depict them in the vertical plane. A more serious fault at St Vigean is that the bow-string lies behind the stock, and therefore is out of contact with the arrow. At Shandwick, however, the bow-string is correctly sited. What is absent from either carving is any depiction of the trigger mechanism, which would have been concealed on the underside of the stock.

Artefactual evidence of the use of bows and arrows is very scanty. From Munro's excavations at Buiston crannog (1882, 190–239) came a carved object of antler (illus 51, 7), which has been identified as a rather roughly fashioned nut from the trigger mechanism of a crossbow. It is reasonable to assign this nut to the main period of occupation of the crannog, namely late 6th to early 7th century AD (below 16.4.1). A tentative illustration of an appropriate trigger-mechanism is presented here (illus 51, 7d). Buiston also yielded three socketed iron arrowheads (illus 51, 4–5), of which one has a heavy tapering head of square cross-section, which seems likely to be a crossbow bolt (illus 51, 5). In the Norton in Cleveland cemetery there was a socketed missile head interpreted as a small spearhead (Sherlock & Welch 1992, grave 42.5); but the rhomboidal cross-section, though not as massive as the Buiston example, may suggest a crossbow bolt (illus 51, 6).

#### 12.1.5 Shields and body armour (illus 50)

##### Shields and shield-bosses

Shields, and other small round objects more properly classed as targes, are known from Anglo-Saxon graves, and also very commonly from Pictish scenes of riders and warriors. In the graves the principal remains are the boss, the hand-grip which the boss protected, and the rivets which fastened them to the board. Of the board itself, the most that normally remains is the stain of decayed wood in the soil. At Norton, five bosses were found, datable to the 5th (especially later 5th) and 6th centuries. Without entering into refinements of typology, it can be said that they are variants on the theme of a conical profile which rises to a spike-like apex. At Norton there was no evidence for the size or

shape of the boards, but elsewhere it can be seen that they are mostly circular, and fall within the diameter range of 0.4–0.6m (16–24 in) (comprehensive study by Dickinson & Härke 1992).

Among the Picts, the best evidence is from the Aberlemno churchyard stele (*ECMS*, 209–14). The particular importance of this is that in three cases the targes are depicted in profile, showing that the board was not flat but convex. (This is true also of one example on the Franks Casket: *illus* 172 below). Moreover, the bosses are not conical, but of ‘sugarloaf’ profile, which appears in the later 7th century among the Anglo-Saxons: a date which would conform well with the probable 8th-century date at Aberlemno. So far as their size can be estimated, the Aberlemno targes range from 0.45m to 0.55m (18–22 in) diameter. The larger ones are carried by the foot-soldiers; but in a parade scene at Dull, Perthshire (*ECMS*, 315), it is the riders who carry the larger targes.

We must now consider the role of such targes as both offensive as well as defensive weapons. Härke, while recalling the traditional use of the Germanic shield in an aggressive mode, considers that the size of shield and form of the bosses which were developed among the early Anglo-Saxons were more suited to a defensive role in ‘parrying blows and catching the enemy’s blade’ (Dickinson & Härke 1992, 55–60). From a soldier’s point of view, however, the Anglo-Saxon boss often took the form of an iron cone, 90mm (3.5in) or more high, and possibly ending in a spike. If this were thrust into an enemy’s face, it was likely to cause a degree of damage, and may even reduce his fighting ability. This may be even truer of the Pictish bosses, which, to judge from contemporary carvings, probably protruded as much as 125mm (5in) from the board. Moreover, if the board itself had been badly shattered by sword- or even spear-blows—as the heroic poetry suggests was a common event—the boss might make a welcome weapon of last resort.

Brief mention must also be made of a small group of rectangular shields carried by Pictish footmen, normally hunters (JNG Ritchie 1969; for the example at Eassie, see Prologue). Some of these have a deep notch in their upper and lower edges. In other, possibly derived depictions, the upper edge is merely slightly concave. It seems plausible to suggest that the purpose of the notch is to engage an enemy’s pike and wrench it out of his grip. Apart from the carvings, there is no evidence for such shields in an Insular context. A particularly good depiction is that on the side panel of the St Andrew’s sarcophagus. Finally, towards the northern limits of Pictish culture, at the Brough of Birsay, Orkney, comes a carving of three men on foot carrying swords, spears, and shields which are truly square (Ritchie, A 1985, pl 9.1; colour pl 18). That of the leading figure is also richly ornamented; and this, together with other details of dress and hair style, suggests that we are seeing a regal ceremonial procession rather than a martial array.

### Helmets and body-armour (*illus* 50)

While there is no artefactual evidence for helmets and body armour in the area and period of this study, there are two depictions, respectively in the Egil scene on the Franks Casket and the battle scene on the Aberlemno churchyard stele. Despite the Pictish locale of the second of these, both may correctly be attributed to the Angles. In both cases (*illus* 50, 5 & 6) the helmets appear to be crested, with nasal guards and neck protection. In this they resemble the well-known examples from the Sutton Hoo royal ship-burial and from the Coppergate excavation in York (*illus* 50, 11; Tweddle 1992, espec 1099–1100).

As for body armour: two of the warriors on the Franks Casket are depicted with roughly circular pellets on their arms and upper bodies, probably intended to represent, within the technical limits of the medium, ring-mail jerkins (hauberks; illus 50, 1). These cover their arms and extend down to their hips. Below this, both the two with mail jerkins and three of their comrades wear what appear to be pleated skirts (illus 50, 5). A possible explanation for these is that they are protective aprons consisting of leather strips studded with metal, reminiscent of those worn by Roman legionary and some auxiliary troops. On the other hand, they may be exactly what they seem: pleated skirts of some heavy material, possibly leather.

At Aberlemno, one of the two helmeted warriors, assumed to be Angles, lies dead, prey to an eagle or raven. Allen suggested, but with a question mark, that he was wearing 'a divided hauberk of mail' (ECMS, 211). This is certainly the case, as the divided skirt makes plain. (On this, see for instance Mann 1957, 62). It is true that there is no suggestion of ring-mail on the carving as it appears today; but the absence can be fully accounted for by the weathering of the surface of the stele. A greater difficulty is that no trace of knee-length skirts can be seen on the helmeted riders. We might infer from this that, however rare helmets were, hauberks were even rarer.

## 12.2 WEAPON-PLAY: PICTORIAL AND OTHER EVIDENCE

There is little written evidence to inform us about the use of the weapons which we have just surveyed. In *Y Gododdin* there are references to the heroes 'scattering spears', evidently from horseback. The feasibility of this will be discussed below. Meanwhile, we may turn to pictorial representations, with the warning that realistic scenes of battle are extraordinarily rare. This is equally true of the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and of the Frankish realms as well before the Carolingian period. In northern Britain, if we exclude examples of single combat (which may be illustrations for lost heroic legends), we have three particular examples to consider: among the Angles, the Franks Casket (illus 175 below); and among the Picts, the Aberlemno churchyard cross-stele (illus 45 above), and the so-called Sueno's Stone (this chapter illus 52 and below 22.2).

### 12.2.1 Evidence from the Franks Casket

The Franks Casket—thus named because it was presented to the British Museum by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks—is a reliquary casket, carved out of whalebone, probably in Northumbria in the 8th century (further details 22.3.2: illus 175 below). The pictorial themes are outstandingly eclectic, including the story of Romulus and Remus; the visit of the Magi; the Roman sack of Jerusalem under the emperor Titus; and scenes from Germanic legend and folk-lore. These include Weland in his smithy and, our immediate interest, the siege of the archer, Egil, in his fortified homestead (Webster 1982, with pl 21-26; also Wilson 1984, pl 34-37).

The identification of Egil, named in runes behind his head, does not advance our understanding greatly, because the Egil-legend—or saga—which it suggests is lost. Despite our lack of a story-line, however, some details can be established. The fort is a crenelated enclosure, perhaps based on some Mediterranean-derived picture. To the rear, Egil's wife sits in an elaborately decorated hall. Egil is defending the gate with bow and arrow, and he appears to have a supernatural helper, with spear and shield, in the air

above the gate. There are at least six attackers, one of them falling backwards, another transfixed by an arrow. This leaves one other figure unassigned.

In attempting to use the Egil-scene as a guide to the actual character of weapon-play in 8th-century Northumbria, several problems arise. Firstly, the eclectic nature of the casket as a whole, and its implications for the learned milieu of its carving, necessarily presents the possibility that some, or even all, the details of any scene may have been derived from some totally exotic source. This point should not be pressed, because the weapons and military dress do seem appropriate to the area and period.

As an unrealistic feature, however, we may cite the crenellated enclosure which can only be described as implausible. Moreover, there is a basic flaw in the tactical concept of an attack with hand-held weapons on a fortified position which is defended with a medium-range weapon—the bow and arrow. Finally, the constraints imposed by the frame of the carving has resulted in the attackers appearing in distorted postures. Altogether, we can only conclude that, striking though it is as a battle-picture, the Egil scene can tell us little about actual weapon-play.

### 12.2.2 Weapon-play on the Aberlemno Churchyard stone

By contrast, the Aberlemno battle-scene, characteristic of much Pictish carving, seems to offer realistic detail for our analysis (illus 45 above). It occurs on the reverse of the cross-stele in Aberlemno (Angus) churchyard, one of the earliest and finest of the Pictish Class II stones. Beneath the open jaws of two protective serpents, and a group of Pictish symbols, lively scenes of conflict are set out in three rows.

In the top row, a mounted warrior, sword held vertically in his right hand, advances in pursuit of a helmeted horseman who retains his spear, but has discarded his own sword and targe. His horse, very unusually in a Pictish context, is moving in a 'false gallop'. In the middle row, what appears to be the same warrior, distinguished by his helmet, advances with his spear held high and his targe on his left arm, against three foot-soldiers. In the bottom row, a mounted spearman advances from the left to meet a helmeted rider, with spear and targe as in the middle row. But on the extreme right, a helmeted man lies on the ground, his spear discarded behind his head, his targe falling from his hand, and in a stock image of death, a bird of prey is about to attack his unprotected face and throat. In the words of one of the interpolations in *Y Gododdin*, 'the head of Domnall Brecc [a historical king of Dál Riata], ravens gnawed it'.

Before we examine the details of weapon-play, we must consider the possible story line which has been read into the Aberlemno scene. For a start, there is a measure of agreement that the helmeted warrior (assumed to be the same individual in all three rows) is not a Pict, since helmets are otherwise unknown on Pictish carvings; secondly, that he is probably Northumbrian, on the basis of a generalized comparison between the helmet depicted on the stone and the 8th-century Anglian helmet with nasal guard from Coppergate, York (described above: illus 50, 11); and thirdly, that he is a king, on the dual grounds that helmets are exceptionally rare finds even among the Anglo-Saxons, and more positively that in early Germanic society, including that of the Anglo-Saxons, helmets were particularly associated with the inauguration of kings (Nelson 1980, 44-6; 1986, 356-8) and may be taken as an indication of royal status. A more speculative step would be to assume that the bare-headed horseman was a Pictish king.

Returning, however, to the Northumbrian king, it is customary to identify him with the one such king known to have been slain by the Picts, namely Ecgrith, whose Pictish campaigns have been discussed above (10.1). In that case, the bottom row depicts, or rather symbolizes, the Pictish victory at Nechtansmere in AD 685. What, then, is the significance of the two upper rows? Again, it has been customary to view the overall composition as a 'strip-cartoon', which develops chronologically from top to bottom. If this is so, then we may be seeing three incidents in the course of the single battle of Nechtansmere; or perhaps more likely, three incidents in the history of Picto-Northumbrian military interactions. A third suggestion is that we see, in abbreviated form, the whole battlefield, with the Pictish army drawn up with an infantry centre, and mounted flanks, attacked on three fronts by a mounted Anglian force.

This third interpretation may be regarded as the least likely, principally because the suggested Pictish mustering of two mounted flanks with an infantry centre appears to be too sophisticated for the period. As for the other two interpretations, we have no intrinsic means of assessing their relative merits. If, however, we may appeal to a different artistic genre, then we may recall the episodic, even disjointed character of contemporary battle-poetry; or to put it another way, the absence of what we might regard as clear story-lines. If there is a valid parallel here, then we may incline to the view that we are being shown three quite independent incidents; and more daringly, that the helmeted figures are not necessarily one and the same Anglian king. Indeed, when we recall that the dead warrior is wearing a hauberk, whereas there is no evidence for such body-armour on the other three, it seems likely that the four cannot represent one and the same person in the same battle.

Of course, such a conclusion would undermine the interpretation of the bottom row as a celebration of the slaying of Ecgrith at Nechtansmere. Nonetheless, we might accept that, within our limited historical knowledge, that battle was the only outstanding Pictish victory over the Angles, and certainly the only one in which a king was slain. We might then relate the erection of the stone to the publication in AD 731 of Bede's account of the Pictish victory in the *Ecclesiastical History* (*HE* iv, 26). Not only was this a signal victory over a traditional enemy, but also, as Bede makes clear, it led to the Pictish recovery of territory which the English had formerly held. Bede's account, so stimulating to Pictish pride, appeared early in the reign of one of the greatest and most aggressive of Pictish kings, Oengus, son of Fergus (reigned AD 729-61). Could it have prompted a public and permanent statement of Pictish independence, recalling, in the manner of heroic poetry, several triumphs culminating in the greatest one at Nechtansmere? In other words, are we presented, not with illustrations of one or three actual battles, but with a generalized statement about Picto-Anglian conflict, ending in a memorable Pictish victory?

This discussion of possible interpretations of the Aberlemno battle-scene in politico-military terms has been necessary in order to expose their essential frailty. Such scenarios must remain speculative, though not necessarily valueless on that account. The further implication is that we cannot deduce battle-tactics or formations, still less strategies, from the pictorial evidence. What we may hope to do is to make reasonable deductions about weapon-play.

Pictish riders frequently carry swords (as well as spears), whether on social or military occasions. At Aberlemno, the top right rider holds his sword upright, in an 'on-guard'

position. His only concern is to encourage the retreat of the Anglian rider, who has dropped his sword and targe and holds his spear at the trail.

The two lower Angles hold spears at head height and sloping slightly downward. What are they proposing to do with them? In attempting an answer, we must remember two problems: firstly, these riders lack both saddles and stirrups to give them a stable seat on the horse; and secondly, while it is relatively easy to insert a spear-blade, backed by the momentum of horse and rider, into a human or animal body, it is quite another matter to extract it against the suction of the flesh and the weight of the body. We can therefore reject any thoughts of the cavalry lances of later centuries.

Another possibility is that the spear was meant to be thrown with an overarm motion: in other words, it was a javelin. This has been rejected by some commentators on the grounds that it would be impossible to throw accurately because of the rider's insecure seat. The objection can be countered, however, by reference to the hunting scene from Scoonie, Fife (*ECMS*, 347). This clearly shows a rider who has just thrown a spear at a stag, successfully lodging it in the beast's hindquarters. If a spear might be thrown on the hunting field, clearly there can have been no obstacle to its use as a javelin on the field of battle. Consistent with this, Anna Ritchie has acutely drawn attention to the fact that the Anglian riders have reigned their horses back to steady the throw (1989, 24-5, with excellent photographs). The Pictish rider and the leading foot-soldier ward off the javelins with their targes.

On the evidence of the heroic poem, *Y Gododdin*, a quite different method of spear-handling has been postulated for the Northern Britons. This is based on the frequency of references to the scattering of spears between armies. For students unversed in the Old Welsh language, and therefore dependent on translations such as those of Jarman (1988) and Koch (1997), the word 'scattering' might suggest either the hyperbole of Heroic poetry; or alternately, that a hero may have thrown spears—perhaps carried in reserve by a squire—on several occasions throughout a battle. But the common usage of the Old Welsh word translated as 'scattering' is of a farmer casting seed on the field. (I am grateful to Dr NA Jones for this information). From this comes the belief that the individual warrior carried a clutch of spears, to be thrown in very quick succession. This concept of multiple-spear-throwing gains fresh support from Koch's recent translation concerning the hero Marchleu, who 'scattered his ashwood [spears] from the four clefts of his hand' (Koch 1997, 47).

Even before this translation had appeared, J Rowland (1995) had cited evidence for multiple-spear throwing from a Roman military manual, the *Ars Tactica* of Arrian (Hyland 1993). Arrian describes a cavalry drill or display in which a squadron advances on targets, wheels in front of them, and then retreats, meanwhile throwing three lights javelins or darts. This manoeuvre—which Hyland includes among 'parade-ground exercises to be performed before an informed military audience' (Hyland 1993, 14)—took place on ground with a carefully prepared surface, without soft or uneven patches.

It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast with any actual field of battle which the Gododdin host might have encountered. To natural irregularities of the ground, the realities of mortal combat would quickly add obstacles in the form of broken weapons, horses and warriors. In short, whatever the case for highly trained and disciplined Roman troops on a parade ground, it is extremely difficult to believe that northern barbarian warriors could perform such manoeuvres under battle conditions.

Returning to the visual evidence provided by the Pictish carvings, we can find no support for multiple-spear-throwing, nor for the carrying of quivers of darts or other light spears. The 'casting of spears between armies' should therefore be regarded as a poetic convention rather than a realistic statement about warfare.

It might, of course, be argued that the Pictish carvings themselves present a pictorial convention rather than a factual statement. But there is one powerful argument in support of the claim for Pictish realism: namely, the sculptors' treatment of the movement of horses in battle and in hunting (Hughson 1992). The Picts rejected the wide-spread and long-lived Eurasiatic convention of the 'flying (or false) gallop', which they could have observed, for instance, on still-visible distance slabs of the Antonine Wall. Instead, Pictish horses move at recognizable walking and trotting gaits. This must encourage us to believe that the weapons and activities of their riders had also been closely observed and realistically presented.

Another set of troublesome problems concerns the interpretation of the Pictish foot-soldiers. In the front rank is a swordsman, therefore probably a noble warrior, holding his sword high over his shoulder, ready for a downward slashing action. Behind him is a man with his targe hung from his left shoulder, and holding two-handed an exceptionally long spear, in effect a pike. In the third rank is a man with a more normal length of spear held vertically at rest.

This scene suggests a clever deployment of infantry, in which the two front ranks provide mutual protective cover; but this view may be too naive. The basic concept of covering the front rank with pikes protruding through from the rear is that of the Macedonian phalanx of the 3rd century BC. Given the necessarily scaled-down presentation of actions which must originally have involved hundreds of warriors, it is not unreasonable to see at Aberlemno a conventional representation of the six or more ranks of a Greek-style phalanx.

This immediately poses the question: could the Picts have been familiar with the basic concept of the phalanx, transmitted at a number of removes? At first sight this seems quite unlikely, especially because the very few Greek authors who describe the phalanx appear not to have been known in Early Historic Britain. But this objection is itself naive. Although Plato's *Republic* was not among the books known to have been available to Bede, he quotes the work in praise of kings as philosophers and philosophers as kings (*HE* v, 21). The Pictish stone Meigle no 1 depicts a camel rising awkwardly from its knees, as camels do indeed rise from rest (*ECMS*, 296-7, fig 310B); and also a Zoroastrian Ahura-mazda or divine image, as RBK Stevenson first pointed out (1970, 73, with Taf 52,3). With impeccable evidence for *exotica* such as these (to say nothing of the centaurs common on cross-stele), it would be rash to rule out the possibility that the Picts had some knowledge of the phalanx, however garbled.

Phalanx-derived or not, the Aberlemno infantry array raises a tactical problem, which it shares with the phalanx itself. Excellent as a defence to the front, the protruding pikes make it difficult to turn in order to respond to a flank attack: quite simply, the pikes get in the way. So if Aberlemno does present us with an accurate image of Pictish infantry drawn up for battle—and especially a confrontation with mounted warriors—it may not have been so clever a tactic as at first appears.

### 12.2.3 Military depictions on Sueno's Stone

Turning now to the third of our examples: the so-called Sueno's Stone, by Forbes, Moray, is the tallest surviving cross-stele at about 6.5m (21 ft), and as such gave much scope for pictorial details (illus 52). The stele bears no Pictish symbols, and thus is formally Post-Pictish. A certain stiffness in the figures, especially as compared with the Aberlemno stele, is consistent with such a classification. At the same time, it must be recognized that some of the interlace-carving, especially on the sides of the slab, is definitely of high quality. A date in the 10th century has sometimes been suggested, but there are no good reasons for excluding a date in the later 9th.



52  
Sueno's Stone,  
Forbes, Moray:  
pictorial face of the  
cross-slab (*Historic  
Scotland*).

As has been indicated, the pictorial detail is rich. There is a good initial description of it, with some minor inaccuracies in detail, by Allen (*ECMS*, 149-51 with fig 156A). An admirable feature of this is its descriptive objectivity, which makes no attempt to impose a narrative interpretation on what is visible. By contrast, this is the weakness of the very full description and interpretation by Southwick (1981). The first problem in attempting a description is that, especially compared with Aberlemno, the figures are badly weathered, the more so the higher on the stone. As a result, it is often difficult to determine the weapon-play, or even the pace of horses, so that some observers see horses galloping to the left, or fleeing from victorious infantry, where others might see an orderly parade of horsemen followed by foot-soldiers.

The pictorial face is divided very firmly into four unequal panels by horizontal ribs. This in itself might suggest that we are not to expect a continuous narrative; and this would, of course, be consistent with the episodic structure of battle poetry. In other words, the dividing ribs may be intended to indicate a series of events. Despite this, in recent notices the stone has been read as a continuous narrative of a battle from the initial mustering of an army to the final defeat and scattering of the enemy.

One feature of subtle detail does perhaps support the concept of a narrative to be read from top to bottom: namely, that the figures are larger on the upper half of the slab, as though to compensate for their optical diminution. But the weakest element in the concept of a continuous battle narrative is that the continuity is interrupted in the middle of the main panel, and again in the panel below that, by scenes of decapitation, with headless bodies laid out in rows together with piles of severed heads.

While no doubt decapitation might often be the fate of the defeated, it seems extremely doubtful that the flow of an actual battle would be interrupted for such a purpose. Furthermore, while a modern fire-fight from an entrenched position may leave neat rows of corpses (see, for example, photographs from the American Civil War), Primitive-Realistic depic-

tions from Hastings to Little Big Horn show that when edged slashing weapons are used, parts of bodies are scattered untidily over the field.

Looking at the stone as a 9th-century observer might have done, it is the decapitation theme which dominates it. At eye-height, and on the centre line, is a severed head in a slab-lined niche. To the archaeologist, this recalls the heads in niches in La Tène Gaul,

and prompts the question, was there some ancestral resonance here for a 9th-century AD Pict? Below and to the left are heads and bodies, gathered under a canopy with animal-headed finials. From here up to a height of some 3.6m (12ft)—that is, the main viewing range—decapitation is the leading theme, including, again on the centre line, an actual beheading. These scenes are then bracketed, above and below, by lines of men and horses, building a picture of a great ceremonial occasion.

At this point, it may be objected that a seemingly pagan practice is surely utterly out of place on a great Christian monument, which is what the cross-face of Sueno's stone certainly is. But a little-known association of a Christian chapel with severed human heads in stone cists may be cited at Clow chapel, Watten, Caithness (Talbot 1980). There, at least five heads, severed at the seventh vertebra, had been buried significantly outside the north wall of the chapel. Both children and adults were present. No further details are available and, other than medieval, no precise date can be suggested.

The wider theme of decapitation does indeed deserve a digression. In *Canu Urien*, a series of *englynion* devoted to Urien of Rheged, there is a group of 14 stanzas beginning 'I carry a head on my side,.. or belt,.. or shoulder', the head being that of Urien, and the narrator being Urien's cousin and a member of his warband (Rowland 1990, 76–84; text 420–2; translation 477–8). This, then, is an account of the rescue of a king's head. Pictorially, this theme can be seen on the plinth of the 8th/9th-century North Cross at Ahenny, Co Tipperary, where a procession, led by an ecclesiastic with a processional cross, has as its central element a headless corpse carried on a horse; the head itself is held by a man at the rear of the procession (Richardson & Scarry 1990, 29, with pl 2 & 4).

In a Northumbrian context, there are confused records of the fate of Edwin's head. Welsh tradition appears to have claimed that it was taken to Cadwallon's principal centre at Aberffraw in Anglesey (Bromwich & Jones 1978, 3). Bede, however, asserts that it was brought to York and placed in St Peter's church (*HE* ii, 20); though elsewhere he implies that Edwin was buried in the monastery at Whitby (*HE* iii, 24). After the slaying of Edwin's successor, Oswald, by Penda of Mercia, in AD 642, the corpse was dismembered, the head and hands being hung on stakes. A year later, Oswald's successor Oswiu rescued these relics, and buried the head at Lindisfarne (*HE* iii, 12). It is clear from these 7th-century instances that the capture and recovery of the heads of kings and other potentates was an important concomitant of warfare (as, indeed, it remained in northern Britain into the early modern centuries).

To return to Sueno's Stone: on the interpretation offered here (and alternatives may readily be found in the literature), the pictorial face of the stele presents a great ceremony which, it appears, may be practised by both pagans and (nominal) Christians. Such a celebration may indeed be one of the principal fruits of war; but it can tell us nothing about how warfare was actually conducted.

### 12.2.4 The evidence of wounds

There remains one other approach to weapon-play: that of the actual wounds, most probably caused in battle, which have left traces on skeletons. This is a topic which has received little attention. Indeed, we have no quantity of evidence as to how frequently battle-wounds may be detected in Anglo-Saxon graves. We may well believe that, in the case of a defeated army, few bodies would have been recovered for formal burial.

A detailed study has, however, been possible on skeletons from a cemetery at Eccles, Kent (Wenham 1989). Six skeletons all had recognizable injuries to the head; two of them also had injuries elsewhere on the skeleton. The head wounds—which would have been fatal—had been caused by sharp-edged blades with minimum lengths between 80–160mm (3–6in). It was concluded that ‘all...the injuries were probably produced by swords’. In one case a blow had partially decapitated the victim.

These conclusions, based as they are on both observation and experiment, are obviously of great interest, but they do raise one considerable problem from an archaeological view-point: namely, that all the fatal wounds are attributed to swords, whereas by far the commonest Anglo-Saxon weapons were spears of various shapes and sizes. It is difficult to believe that the spear was purely a hunting weapon, of no significance on the battlefield.

Two points may, however, be made in favour of the spear. First, weapons like those from Norton graves 34 and 55 (Swanton 1973, type L), with their long blades kept sharp by whetting, could have inflicted injuries comparable to those attributed to swords at Eccles, if the spear was used with a slashing motion. Secondly, a human body has large areas of soft tissue, from the groin to the lower ribs, in which serious and ultimately fatal damage can be inflicted. Such damage would, of course, be undetectable on the skeleton, our only present source of evidence for war wounds.

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## HILLFORTS & ENCLOSED PLACES

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION: DEFINING TERMS AND CHRONOLOGY

For the most part, the information derived from annals, narrative sources and poetry refers either to pitched battles or to attacks on fortified places. Moreover, fortified sites provide a very large part of the archaeological evidence for the period. North of the modern Anglo-Scottish border, some 18 Early Historic forts and other royal centres can be identified from reliable written sources; and a further three or four can be added in Bernicia south of the border. But when we add sites identified on archaeological grounds such as fort-typology, associated finds, and radiocarbon dating, then a gazetteer of over 100 sites can be drawn up for northern and western Britain as a whole (Alcock & Alcock, 1990, illus 19).

The monuments relevant to warfare are conventionally classed as hillforts. In Britain as a whole there are more than 2,500 of these, especially in southern and south-western Britain and the Welsh Marches, the border hills of Scotland, and the western coastlands of Wales and Scotland (Hogg 1975; 1979). Many of them are on hill-tops, rocky knolls or sea-girt promontories, but the classification also includes others which have no such natural protection. Moreover, while some have quite massive defences, especially in the form of multiple banks and ditches, others are little more than strongly-walled farm-yards.

Consequently, the blanket term 'hillfort' has come to be viewed with some disfavour, and a more neutral term, with no specific military implications, is preferred here: enclosed places. This has the further advantage that sites protected by swamps or open water, but without other characteristics in common with conventional forts, may be included: that is to say, crannogs.

On the whole, enclosed places have been regarded as works of the pre-Roman Iron Age, but with occasional precursors in the Bronze Age or even the Neolithic. However, excavation has demonstrated that in south-western England and Wales, some pre-Roman sites were re-occupied in the post-Roman period, perhaps with refurbished defences, while others may have been founded and occupied wholly in the 5th and later centuries AD (Alcock 1995a). Such post-Roman activity has, however, been regarded as exceptional.

In northern Britain, however, the chronological range is strikingly different. Radiocarbon dates from the construction phases of northern enclosed places—that is, dates derived especially from structural timbers in the ramparts—show that, after a hiatus in fort-building in the early centuries AD, there was a new wave of construction, beginning in the 3rd century, gathering momentum in the 5th, and perhaps extending through to the 8th century AD. Moreover, out of all the northern forts for which radiometric dates are available, about half were either earlier forts which had been refurbished in the later

period, or had been newly constructed on virgin sites at that time.

These chronological conclusions should not surprise us. Although such late building or re-use of 'hillforts' is unknown in eastern and southern England—that is, the areas of early Anglo-Saxon settlement—it is widely known throughout barbarian Europe, among both the Germans and the Slavs (eg Fehring 1991, Chap 4; Gojda 1991, Chap 3; Kobyliński 1990).

The implications of the radiometric dating are supported by written evidence for activity—often, but not exclusively, of a military character—on these sites. The details are tabulated below, and can be summarized as follows. There are five records of burnings or attempted burnings; one capture; one destruction; and six sieges. In addition there is archaeological evidence for burning (which was not necessarily the result of military action) at *Alt Clut* (Dumbarton), Burghead, Clatchard Craig, Coludesburh, Cruggleton, Dundurn, Green Castle (Portnockie), Mote of Mark, Urquhart and Yeavering. Particular instances will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Table 5  
Written evidence  
for military  
incidents at  
enclosed places  
excluding  
unidentified annal  
entries.  
*AU* = Annals of  
Ulster;  
*HE* = Bede,  
*Historia*  
*Ecclesiastica*

<i>Burnings or attempted burnings</i>	Bamburgh: <i>HE</i> iii, 16, pre-651 (but see comments on the credibility of this 4.2.3 above).
	Dunollie: <i>AU</i> , 686, 698
	Tarbert Boitte [Tarbert Loch Fyne? ]: <i>AU</i> , 712, 731
<i>Capture</i>	Dunadd: <i>AU</i> , 736
<i>Destruction</i>	Dunollie: <i>AU</i> , 701
<i>Sieges</i>	Aberte [Dunaverty?]: <i>AU</i> , 712.
	<i>Alt Clut</i> [Dumbarton]: <i>AU</i> , 870
	Dunadd: <i>AU</i> , 683.
	Dundurn: <i>AU</i> , 683.
	Dun Fother [Dunnottar?]: <i>AU</i> , 681, 694

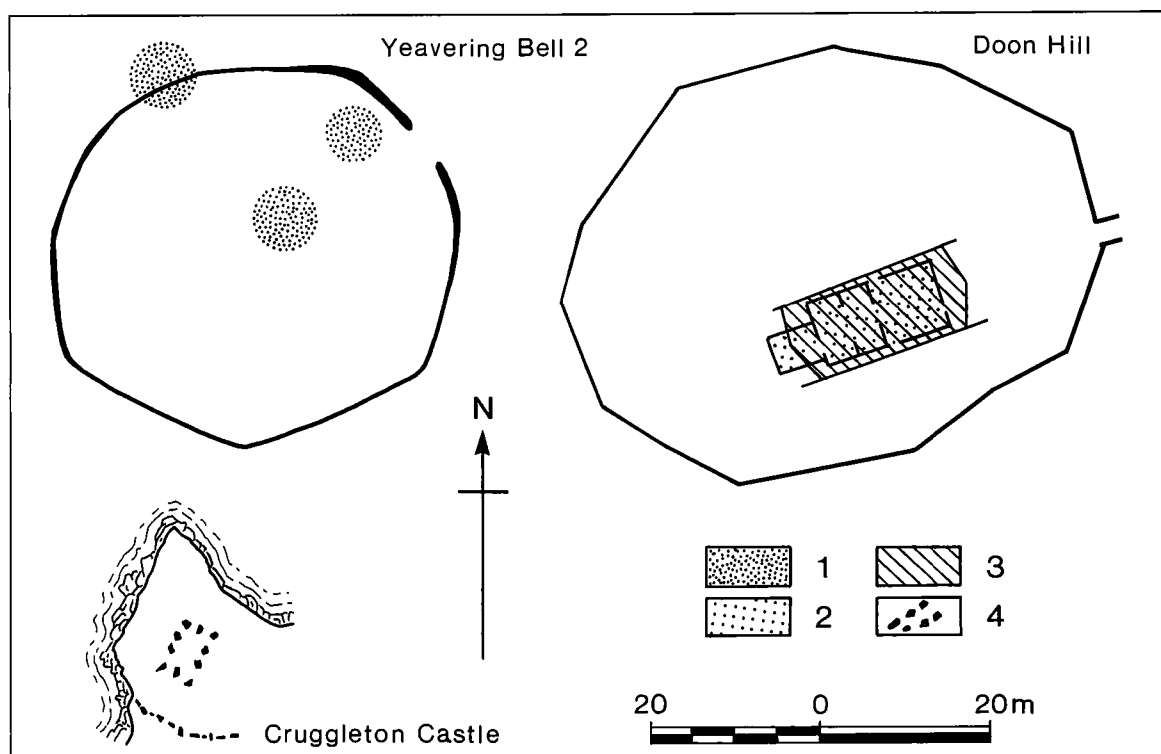
## 13.2 CLASSIFICATION OF ENCLOSED PLACES

### 13.2.1 Structural character of the enclosing work

#### Palisades

At its simplest, the enclosing work may consist of nothing more than a stout fence or palisade (illus 53). No trace of this is likely to be visible at ground level. Indeed, palisades are normally only discovered by air photography (which of course gives no clue to their date); or by chance in the excavation of the over-lying ramparts of the more readily recognisable classes of enclosures which have stone walls or earth-and-rubble banks.

Normally, palisades occur as a single line, either of continuous vertical planks, or of intermittent upright posts linked by horizontal planks, set in a bedding trench. This may



be up to 0.8m (31in) deep and 0.45m (18in) wide. The position of the vertical members may be marked by soil stains, by gaps between packing stones, or even by the remains of burnt timbers. More rarely, the uprights are set in individual pits which again may be up to 0.8m (31in) deep. An exceptional group of large double-palisaded enclosures in Bernicia will be discussed below (15.1).

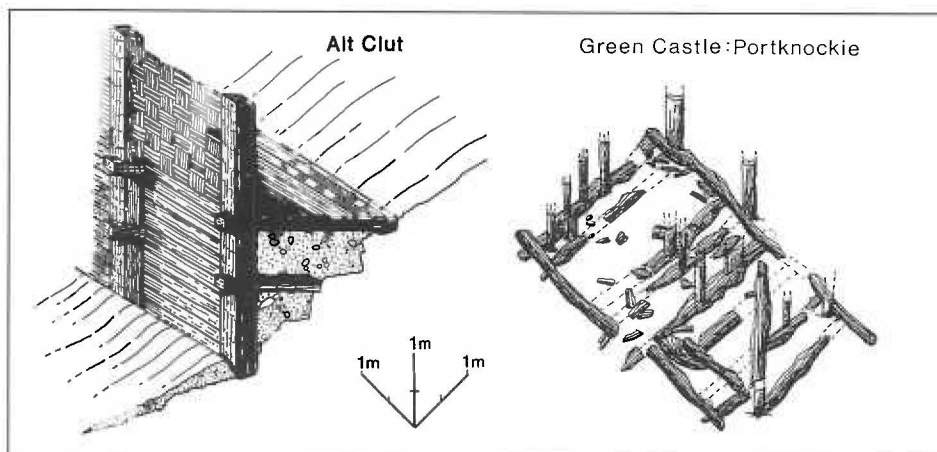
53  
Plans of palisaded works: Yeavinger Bell 2, Doon Hill and Cruggleton Castle.

Turning now to the sites enclosed by walls or earth-and-rubble banks: banks are frequently revetted at the front with stone or timber, while walls have near-vertical faces to front and rear. In all cases the stonework is unmortared.

Both banks and walls may incorporate timber-framing or other forms of timber reinforcement (illus 54). This takes various forms, with a mixture of vertical, transverse and longitudinal timbers. Sometimes the crossing timbers are fastened together with iron nails or spikes, while in other cases they form a jointed framework. There are also examples of timbers laid in two directions, but not actually fastened together or even touching. Often, however, the precise arrangements cannot be established, because the timber-work has been heavily damaged by burning, with the result that the whole rampart structure has subsequently collapsed.

This was certainly the case, for instance, at *Alt Clut* and at Dundurn. At Green Castle, Portknockie, Banffshire, however, the burning had actually preserved charred timber so well as to allow the internal framework at the rear of the rampart to be recovered in three dimensions; that is to say, longitudinal, transverse and vertical (illus 54). The framework consisted largely of squared timbers and planks, though some of the longitudinal

54  
Classic examples  
of timber rein-  
forcements: *Alt  
Clut* (Clyde Rock),  
Dumbarton, and  
Green Castle,  
Portknockie.



members may have been trimmed branches. The verticals were either mortised into the centre of the transverse beams, or halved into their edges. The existing remains account for little more than a third of the overall width of the original bank, the rest having been lost by erosion along the edge of the cliff (Ralston 1987, figs 4 & 5).

### Vitrification

Timber reinforcements and frameworks have been associated, as a causative factor, with the phenomenon of vitrification, in which some of the stones of a wall or bank had been melted, or at least severely cracked, by heat (classic discussion: MacKie 1976). The supposed explanation of this is that, in the course of an attack on a stronghold, the enemy set fire to timbers in the face of the rampart; that the burning of the timbers (together with the rather open character of the stonework itself) created flues; and these, combined with the wind natural to a hill-top, caused an intense fire, a great rise in temperature to as much as 900–1100°C, and consequently the melting of the stonework. A supplementary explanation has been offered to the effect that stone forts with timber-laced walls often had ranges of timber buildings against the inner face of the wall; and if these buildings caught fire—whether by accident or hostile activity—this would intensify the effect of the firing of the outer face of the wall.

This explanation, that vitrification might be induced simply as a result of attackers setting fire to a timber-laced wall is difficult to accept. In the first place, common sense casts doubt on the feasibility of firing the ends of reinforcing beams where they were exposed in the rampart face—especially if any defence was mounted from the wall-head. Common sense is supported by experimental evidence. In 1937, Childe and Thorneycroft built a length of timber-laced wall which incorporated 7 tons 7 cwt (7500kg) of stone, about 1 ton (1016kg) of dry pit-props and 6 cwt (305kg) of scrap timber. In their own words, ‘to ignite the wall, scrap timber and brushwood were heaped around,...about 4 tons [4064kg] being used’ (Childe & Thorneycroft, 1938, 47–9). In a later experiment, Ralston (1986) left the beam-ends protruding from the wall, smeared them with animal fat, and added ‘an articulated lorry-load of off-cuts of timber and brushwood’.

In both experiments, some degree of vitrification occurred; but plainly the conditions

were quite unlike those of a hostile attack on a defended fort. Despite this, they do make it possible to propose a more realistic model. This requires firstly that the fort was not defended, because it had already been captured, and secondly that the objective of the attackers was to destroy it in the most conspicuous manner possible. To this end, great quantities of brushwood and heavier timber were piled over the rampart—no doubt using the defeated defenders as labourers. The timber and brushwood were then fired, and carefully tended over several days, so that the temperature of 1000°C was reached slowly, and thereafter maintained for some days. There is reason to believe that under such conditions the rampart would not merely melt, but would actually incandesce, before it cooled to the solid state of vitrification.

Such a visible symbol of victory may even have been more important than the physical damage to the rampart especially since modern field experience makes it clear that a vitrified fort may still retain formidable defences.

### 13.2.2 Main categories of plan and situation

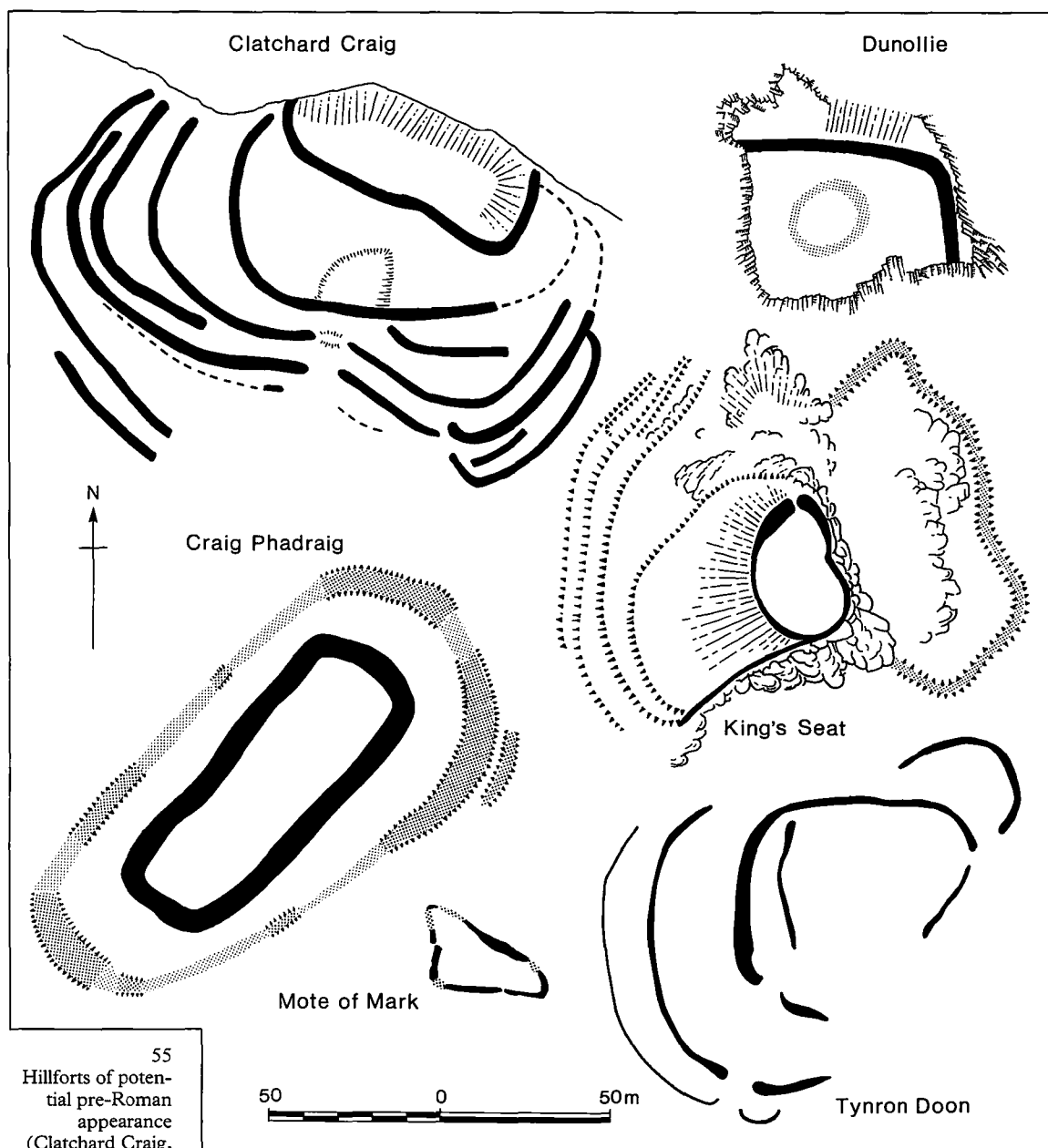
Three main categories of forts and enclosed places may be distinguished in northern Britain: palisaded enclosures, pre-Roman Iron Age hillforts and 1st-millennium AD ring-forts.

#### Palisaded enclosures (illus 53; 54)

We may begin with the simplest class of enclosed site: those protected by one or more timber palisades. These were formerly regarded as characteristic of the later phases of the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age; an interpretation which was borne out by the radiocarbon dates for palisades in central and eastern Scotland. Out of 13 sites, four had calibrated central dates before 500 BC, whereas only one had a central date as late as the 1st century AD (Hill 1982). More recently, however, dates ranging from the 4th to the 9th century AD have come from palisades at Cruggleton, Wigtownshire, Greencastle, Portknockie, Aberdeenshire, and Coludesburh (St Abb's), Berwickshire. It can be taken as established, therefore, that palisades of simple form were still being erected in our period of interest.

Moreover, simplicity of structure need not imply lowly status or feebleness of defence. At Coludesburh, an irregular cliff-top at least 250 x 175m (820 x 570ft) in extent was enclosed, initially with a palisade (illus 56). On one side the cliff falls vertically into the sea, and on the landward side there is also a formidably steep slope. In a second phase, the site was embanked to contain the double monastery founded by the royal abbess, Æbbe. Doon Hill, on an elevated shelf at the eastern end of the Lammermuirs, defended successive phases of a noble hall, initially British, and later Anglian. Even the small palisaded enclosure at Cruggleton occupied a formidable headland site, and protected a timber hall (illus 53).

In addition to the enclosures with single palisades, there is in Bernicia a distinctive group of strong double palisades. These are known at Yeavering from aerial photography and excavation, and at Milfield and Sprouston by aerial photography alone (general background, Smith 1983; 1991). These are a distinctive Anglian form, which is discussed in detail in chapter 16.



55  
Hillforts of potential pre-Roman appearance (Clatchard Craig, Dunollie, Craig Phadraig, King's Seat, Dunkeld, Mote of Mark and Tynron Doon); but except for the unexcavated King's Seat, all have yielded some post-Roman artefacts.

### Hillforts of conventional pre-Roman Iron Age situation and appearance (illus 55)

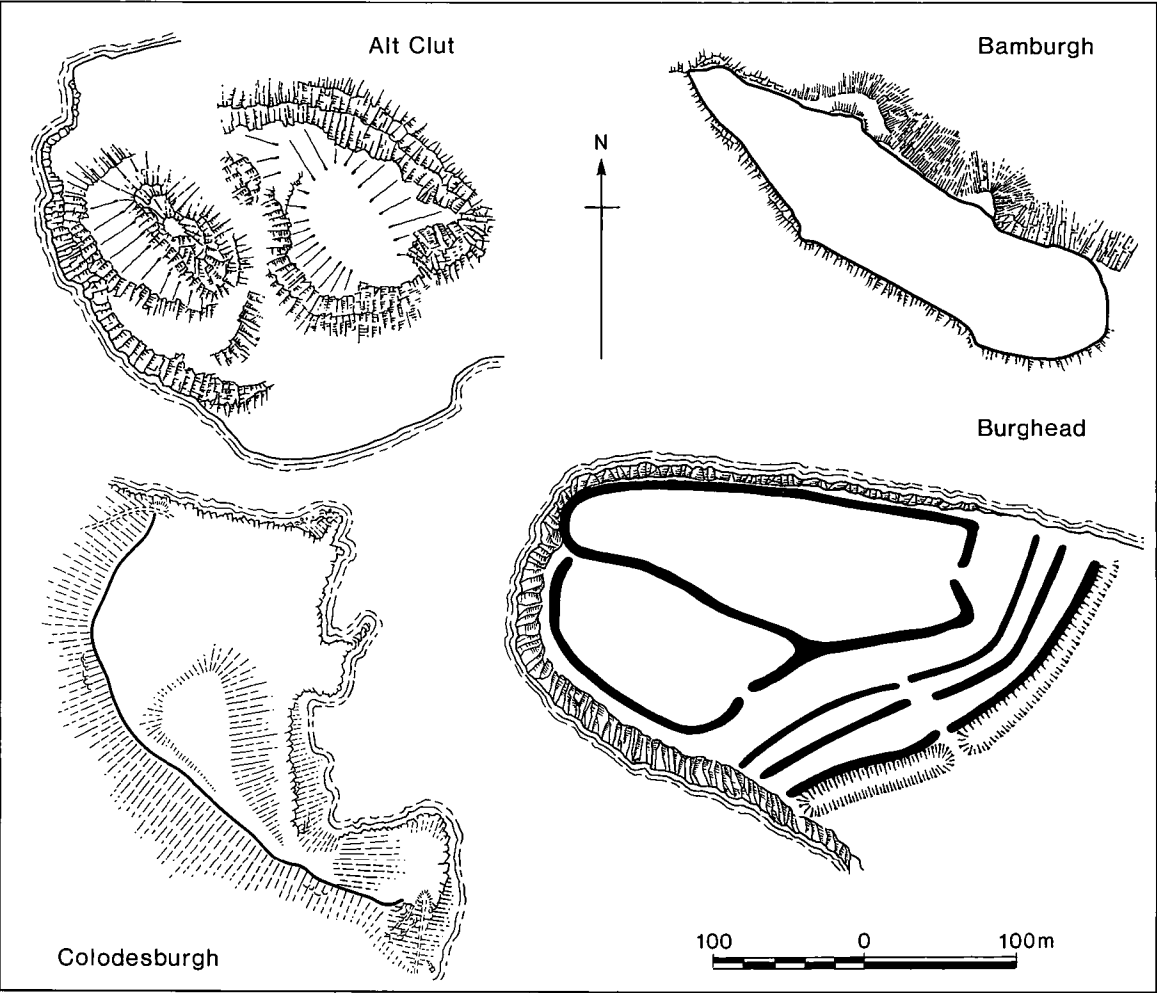
These are sites which in southern Britain would be classed as conventional hillforts of the pre-Roman Iron Age, on the evidence of the superficial appearance of the defensive ramparts—normally in the form of one to four earthen banks—and their situation, especially on hill-tops and on coastal and inland promontories. Inevitably, the classification

of superficially similar forts in northern Britain was biased in favour of a pre-Roman date; but the evidence adduced above has made it clear that such an exclusive dating scheme is untenable.

In southern Britain, the excavation of Cadbury Castle, Somerset (Alcock 1995a), has provided a classic case-study. Before excavation, Cadbury Castle appeared as a typical pre-Roman Iron Age fort, with up to five enclosing banks and ditches, set on an isolated, steep-sided hill, and commanding wide views. There were no surface indications of post-Roman phases of rampart-building or occupation. But excavations in 1966-1970 demonstrated that the entire circuit of the inner rampart, together with the two principal gates, had been entirely remodelled in the late 5th century AD, and again in the early 11th century. The wider implication of this is that surface typology alone cannot determine the chronology of a hillfort (Alcock 1995a).

Turning now to examples of forts of pre-Roman appearance, but proven post-Roman construction (illus 56) or occupation: these include multi-ramparted forts, which occur sometimes (but not exclusively), on the top of lofty or conspicuous hills. A good example among the Britons would be Tynron Doon, Dumfries-shire, which occupies the top of

56  
Four large forts  
with significant  
post-Roman  
evidence.



a hill rising to 288m (946ft) OD (illus 55). Though it has been considered as Iron Age (ie pre-Roman), extensive digging has yielded no artefacts earlier than the 5th/6th century AD. Datable objects include a characteristic iron knife and a fragment of Insular filigree ornament.

Among the Picts, a site with massive multiple ramparts which could readily be paralleled in the southern Iron Age is Burghead in Moray. The importance of Burghead is so great that it will be discussed in more detail in the section below (13.3). For the moment it is enough to notice that there is no material evidence before the 4th/5th century AD. On the other hand, two other forts among the Picts, Clatchard Craig (Fife) and Craig Phadraig (Inverness-shire), have yielded convincing evidence for occupation and both before and after the Roman centuries (illus 55).

Small and simple forts, with only a single rampart, and set on a coastal promontory or a rocky boss beside a navigable estuary, have a characteristically pre-Roman appearance. Of two excavated examples, Green Castle, Portknockie (illus 54), has both Iron Age pottery and radiocarbon dates which span the 7th/8th centuries AD; whereas Mote of Mark, in contrast, has no early dating, but radiocarbon dates for the 4th-6th centuries AD, and a mass of evidence for Insular metalworking centred on the 6th-8th centuries AD (illus 55).

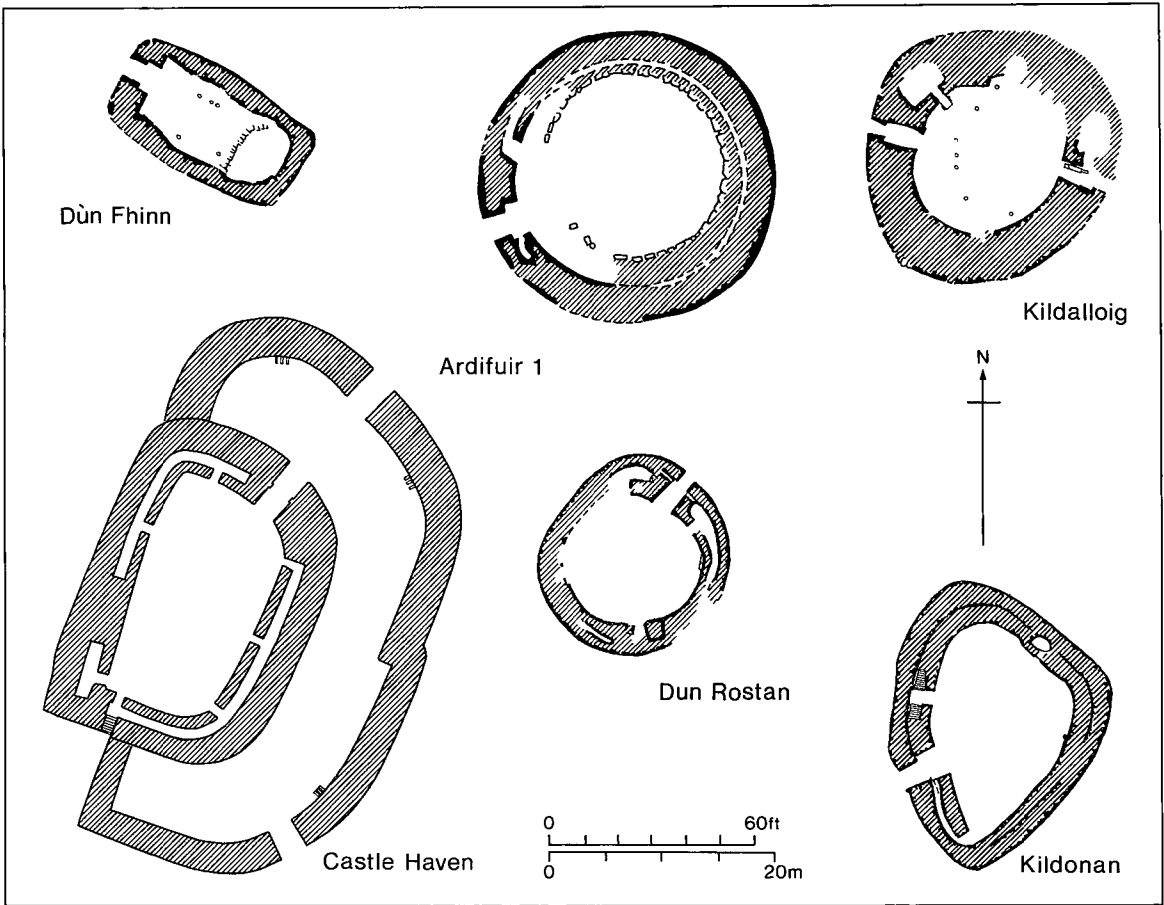
#### Forts of types wholly or predominantly dated to the 1st millennium AD

Numerically speaking, the largest class of forts and enclosed places in our period consists of ring-forts (illus 57). These are the sites known to archaeologists, especially in the west, as duns (Maxwell 1969; Nieké 1990; also Introductions to successive RCAHMS Argyll Inventories). In origin the term is Gaelic; but the vernacular *dun* may apply to any kind of fort, or even in place-names to a knobly or craggy hill which looks suitable for a fort, or which may have had a fort on it. Antiquarians and archaeological fieldworkers, however, have chosen to use this folk-term for technical, classificatory purposes, and confine it normally to small, roughly (and sometimes exactly) circular forts with thick dry-stone walls. It is possible that ditched-and-embanked circular enclosures, now known only from aerial photography in the lowlands of Fife and Strathearn, may be eastern cognates; but certain stone ring-forts along the upper Tay valley are thought to be later (DB Taylor 1990).

Apart from refinements such as the narrowing of the entrance-passage with door-checks, the insertion of cells in the thickness of the wall at the entrance or elsewhere round the perimeter, and the very occasional use of timber reinforcement in the walls, duns appear at first as simple structures. In terms of their dating, and their social status, however, they are not.

As for chronology, their origin has normally been assigned to the pre-Roman Iron Age, though the occurrence of small quantities of Roman material on many excavated duns has led to the conclusion that they continued to be occupied through much of the Roman period. In some areas, especially central Scotland, they may even have acted as focal points of resistance to the Romans. The occurrence of pottery and other finds datable after AD 500 on 70% of excavated duns in Argyll has been dismissed as evidence for 'secondary use' or even 'squatting'.

This chronology is, however, untenable. In Argyll, only one dun, Rahoy, has produced



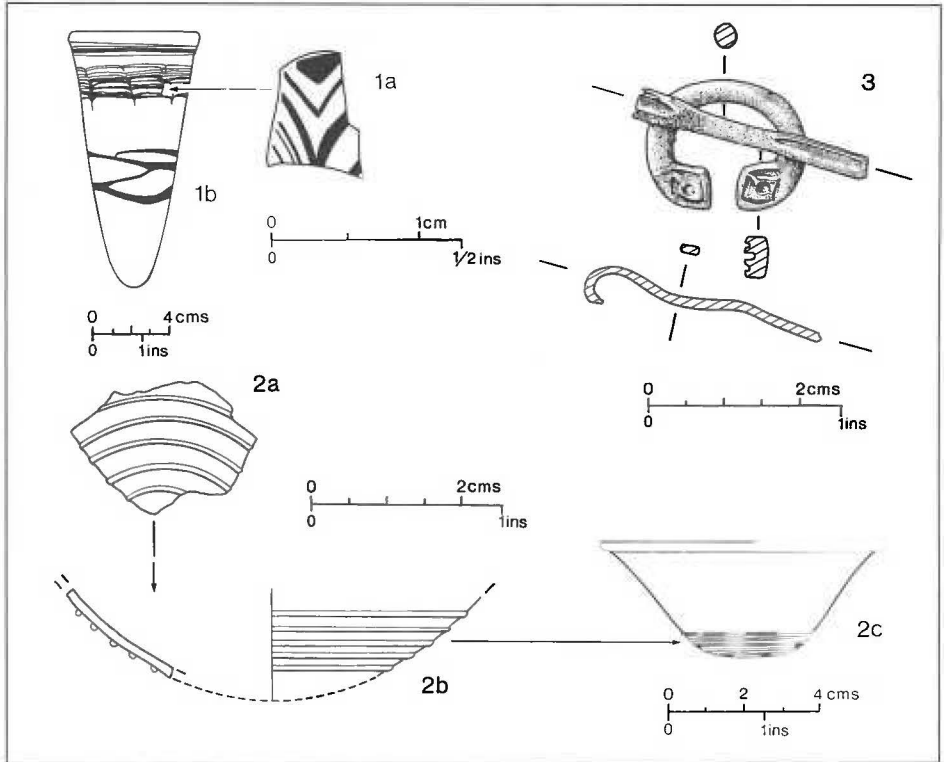
pre-Roman material; so the construction and occupation of duns in the pre-Roman Iron Age must have been rare indeed. Secondly, the occurrence of Roman jewellery, sherds of high quality pottery and coins is well attested in undoubted post-Roman contexts elsewhere. It is therefore reasonable to believe that many of the Roman objects found in duns, especially in Dál Riata, were also deposited in what has come to be called a 'reliquary' context (for the phenomenon, though not the term, White 1988. I owe the usage to R Warner).

In addition, some duns have yielded pottery, glass and metalwork of the 6th to 8th centuries AD. Specific instances include pottery of Class E (see 8.1 above) from Ardifuir and Kildalloig; glass beads from Dùn Fhinn and Ugadale; a bronze brooch from Kildonan; an iron knife from Eilean Rìgh 1 (all these sites in Argyll). Moreover, a badly-damaged dun-like fort at Castlehill, Dalry, Ayrshire, yielded post-Roman glass and a brooch together with Roman-period relics (illus 58; defective plan in Smith 1919 fig 1). With such evidence, there can be no doubt that the period AD 500-850 saw a great flourishing of duns in the west (further discussion in Alcock & Alcock 1987, 127-36).

As for social status: over the past two decades the dun has been defined as a small defensive structure 'enclosing an area not exceeding about 375sq m (4035 sq ft; it would thus normally hold only a single family group' (RCAHMS 1971-92). The objective-

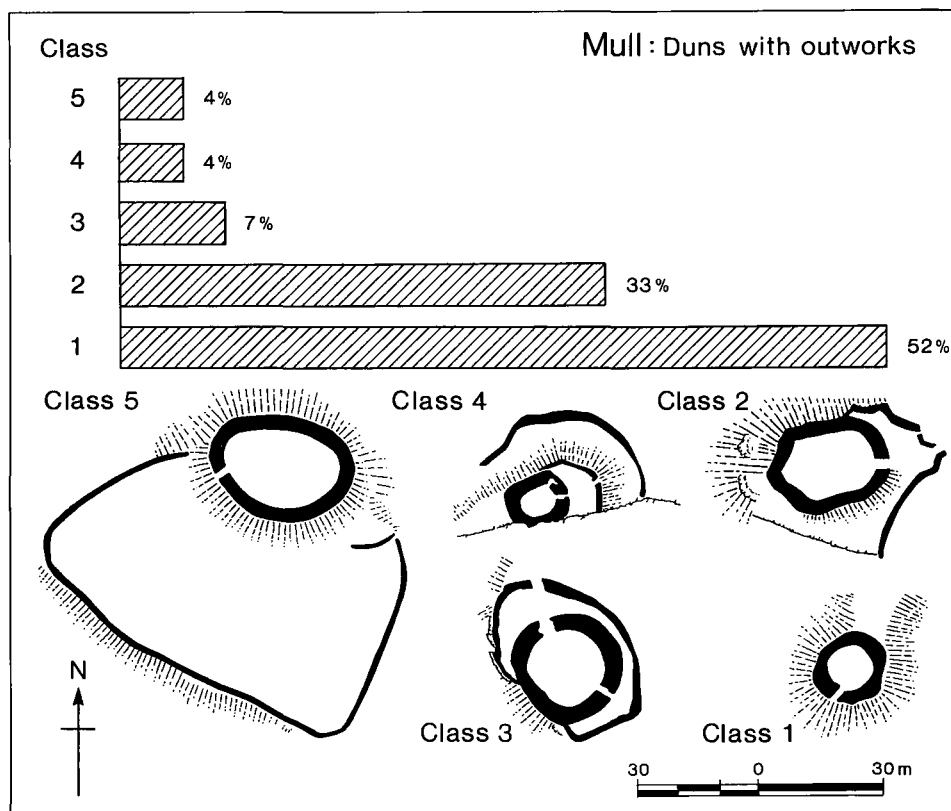
57  
Representative  
ring-fort plans:  
Dùn Fhinn,  
Ardifuir 1,  
Kildalloig, Castle  
Haven, Dun  
Rostan and  
Kildonan.

58  
High status objects  
from Castlehill,  
Dalry, Ayrshire:  
glass beaker  
fragment (1a) and  
reconstruction  
(1b); glass bowl  
fragment (2a, b)  
and reconstruction  
(2c) and penan-  
nular brooch (3).



sounding figure of 375 sq m in fact conceals four issues:

- 1) In practice, the area or diameter has not been the only criterion used in classifying a fort as a dun; subjective aspects of the character of the defences have also been taken into account;
- 2) the actual recorded areas range from the stated 375sq m down to 20sq m (215sq ft), suggesting that the hypothetical single family groups must have differed greatly in wealth and status;
- 3) it is possible to distinguish a group of duns capable of being roofed—those, that is, with a diameter of 15m (50ft) or less, or in the case of oval duns, an internal breadth of 15m or less. These have been classed as ‘dun houses’, as distinct from the larger ‘dun enclosures’. In Argyll, 66% of duns could have been roofed as family dwellings, of very varied size and comfort (Harding 1984; Alcock & Alcock 1987);
- 4) in addition to the basic plan, many duns have outworks of greater or lesser size and elaboration. The Isle of Mull provides a compact area for analysis: there, 48% of all duns have outworks (illus 59). At the simplest, these may take the form of a forecourt in front of the entrance (Mull class 2). Rather more elaborate is the addition of one or two outer walls around part or the whole of the perimeter (Mull classes 3 & 4). At Castle Haven, Borgue, Kirkcudbright, the outwork gives the impression of a bailey attached to the main work (illus 57). Finally, if the dun is on the summit of a hill, with the outwork looping out from it down the slope, then the dun appears as a dominant citadel (Mull class 5).



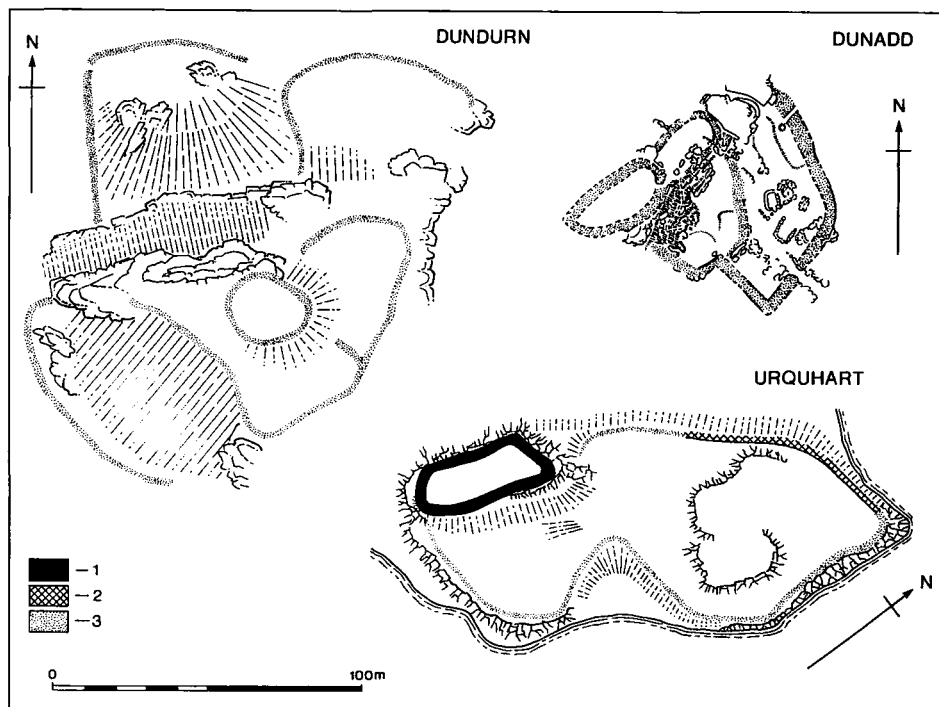
59  
Ring-forts with  
outworks on Mull.

In northern Britain, ring-forts, whether of stone or earthwork, were built by Britons, Picts and Scots, but not apparently by the Angles. The main area of concentration and development of duns, especially in the post-Roman centuries, was indeed among the Scots of Dál Riata. We should not infer from this, however, that they had been derived from or influenced by the contemporary ring-forts of Ireland. As a class the Irish forts were both larger in area and feebler in defensive potential than the duns of Argyll; and they have indeed been described as the embanked farmsteads of middle-rank farmers. In this respect at least, the culture of the Dál Riata Scots cannot be seen simply as a colonial transplant from Ireland.

Returning to the dun-plus-citadel plan of Mull class 5: in other cases, such as Dumyat, Moncreiffe, Stirlingshire, and King's Seat, Dunkeld, Perthshire (illus 55), a compact ring-fort appears to have been built within pre-existing defences. These may have been quarried for building material for the dun; but even in a part-ruined state, they might still have some defensive value. Perhaps more importantly, they interposed additional barriers between the dun itself and the outer world.

In the most elaborate plans, the citadel stands on a rocky boss or hilltop, with several pendant enclosures spreading down the lower terraces. This is the type of plan which has been classified as 'nuclear'. When the class was first defined (Stevenson 1949) it was considered that the overall plan had been conceived as a unitary work, tailored to the terraces and crags of a deliberately chosen hill. The layout was regarded as possessing both social and military implications.

60  
Hierarchical, or  
citadel-plus-  
outwork, plans in  
north Britain:  
Dundurn, Dunadd  
and Urquhart.



Recent excavations at Scottish Dunadd and Pictish Dundurn (illus 60) have demonstrated, however, that the full nuclear plan was not an initial feature of the design, but was achieved by accretion over some centuries (compare Stevenson 1949 with Alcock *et al* 1989). From this it may be concluded that the choice of hill was primary, the outer defences secondary, and the close fit between them was something which evolved, perhaps over several centuries. The stepped profiles of the chosen hills, with a clearly defined summit boss and terraces at several levels, were appropriate to a hierarchical organization of space, which might be further defined or emphasized by the erection of physical barriers as at Dunadd and Dundurn. It is suggested that the term 'hierarchically-organized' would be more appropriate than 'nuclear'.



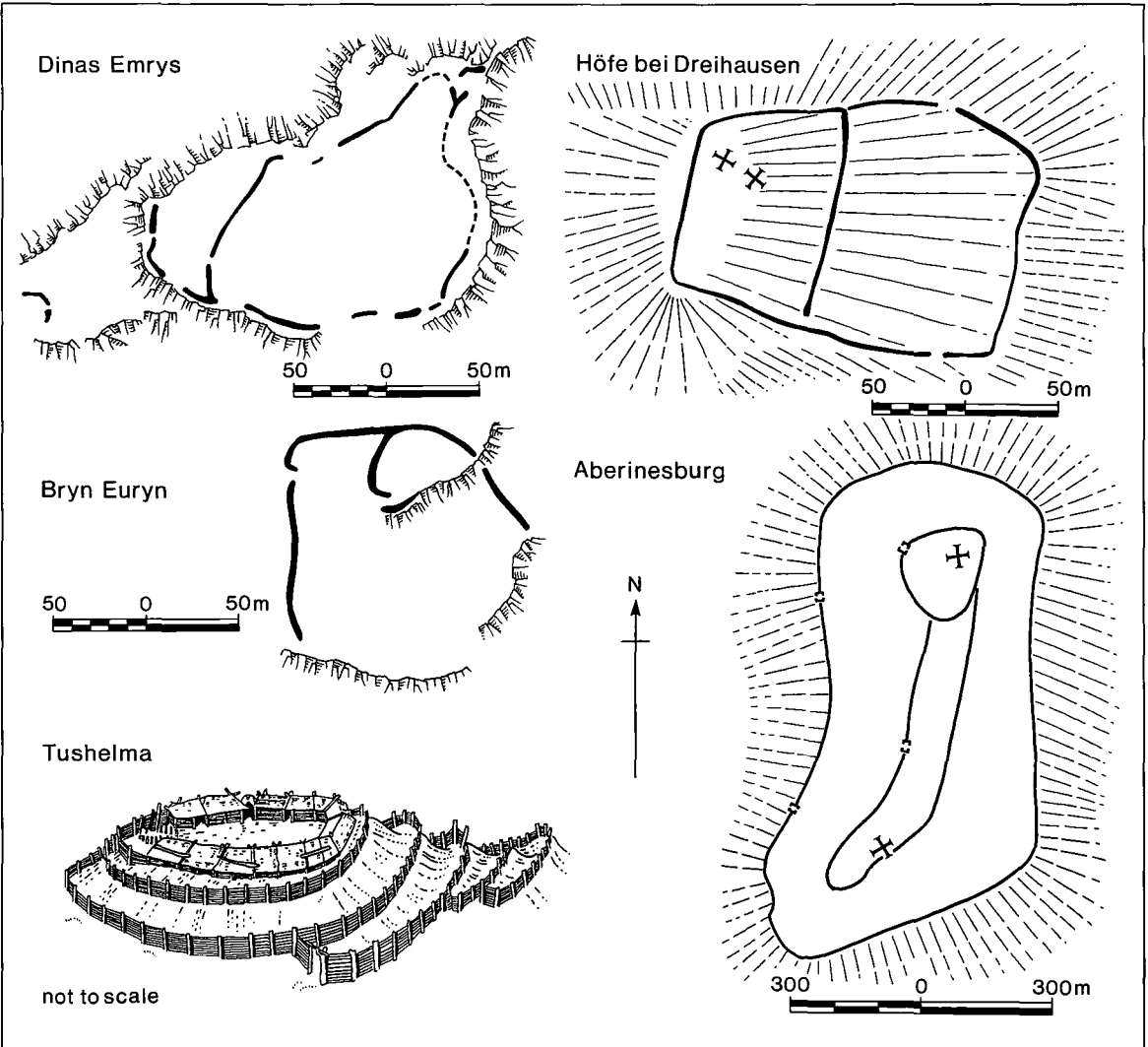
The main conclusion from this brief survey is that the three Celtic peoples of northern Britain were fully aware of the potential of different types of fort, and used them variously, taking account only of local terrain, building materials, and politico-military needs.

Finally, the limited time-range of the forts must be stressed. They appear to be a phenomenon essentially of the 5th to 9th centuries AD, reaching their climax in the elaborate hierarchically-organized forts in the later 7th and 8th centuries. Even when they occupy the site of a pre-Roman fort, as at Craig Phadraig (illus 55), there is a clear hiatus between the two occupations. Again, although some sites were later used for medieval masonry castles, there is no evidence for continuity: rather it appears to be a case of the coincident use of a tactically-sound position in different socio-political circumstances. Examples would be *Alt Clut*, Bamburgh (illus 56), Dunollie (illus 55), and Urquhart

(illus 60). It is particularly striking that no forts appear to have been built as a defence against Scandinavian raids, though *Alt Clut* defied a strong Viking force from Dublin for four months in AD 870.

The developed citadel-plus-outworks plan was not confined to northern Britain (illus 61). In northern Ireland, Doonmore, Co Antrim, appears to be an example, though its date is uncertain. In north Wales, Dinas Emrys has finds of the 5th–6th centuries AD, as well as earlier, while Bryn Euryn may have been one of the seats of the tyrant Cuneglasus, who was castigated by Gildas in the mid-6th century. On the Continent too, a hierarchical division of fort-interiors is common, especially in the form of a *Fürstenburg* (princely fort) or *Hauptburg* (citadel) and a *Vorburg* (bailey or outer enclosure) (Alcock *et al* 1989, 211–3). There is no reason, however, to believe that these and other Continental models influenced the forts of northern Britain, and they are therefore not further discussed here.

61  
Citadel-plus-outwork plans in Wales and Europe: Dinas Emrys, Bryn Euryn, Höfe bei Dreihäusen, Aberinesburg and Tushelma.

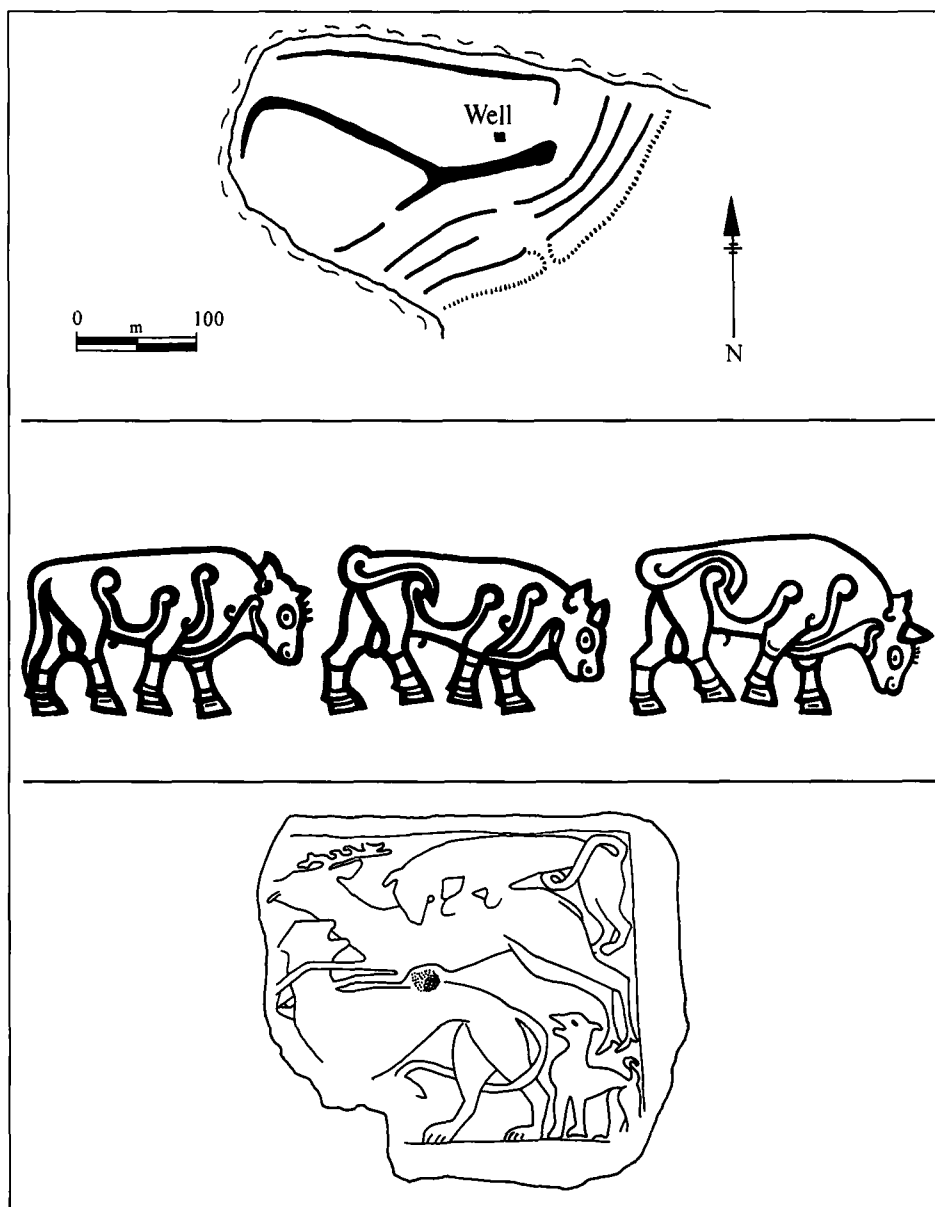


## 13.3 BURGHEAD: A CASE-STUDY

(illus 56; 62-64)

Despite insoluble problems in interpretation, Burghead merits a separate description and discussion, partly because of the character of its structures, but chiefly because of its sheer size. It was founded on a sea-girt headland in the Moray Firth. On the landward side, the ramparts were four-fold, but these were demolished to create a planned town in the early 19th century. Fortunately a plan by General Roy reveals the original

62  
Burghead: top,  
reconstructed plan;  
centre, three  
Pictish bull-  
carvings, perhaps  
from the entrance-  
way; bottom,  
fragment of a  
hunting-scene,  
probably from a  
slab-shrine (*Fill  
Sieveurwright*).



layout of the fort and suggests overall dimensions of about 350m (1200ft) from the tip of the promontory to the outer rampart, and 175m (570ft) from side to side. The usable level area of the interior adds up to about 2.3ha (5.7 acres).

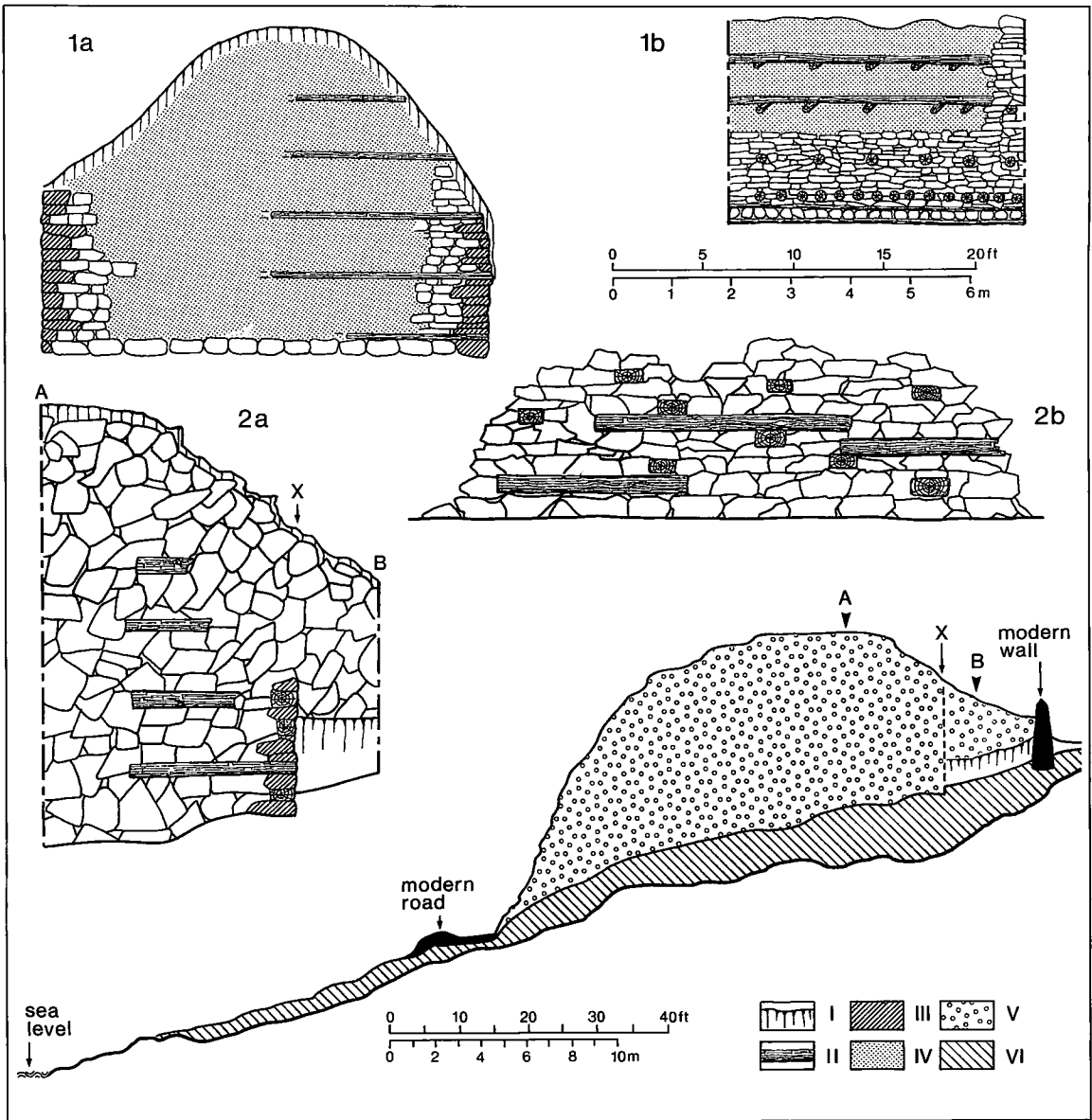
It is thus markedly smaller than the largest southern forts of the 5th century AD and later, such as Cadbury Castle, Somerset, and Tintagel, Cornwall; but such forts are very rare even in the south (Alcock 1995a, illus 11.1). In northern Britain, only the double-walled enclosure at Milfield (below, 15.1) is known to exceed Burghead in area. More significantly, Bamburgh, the royal city (*civitas regia*) and cult-centre of Bernicia is only two-thirds the size of Burghead (illus 56). In overall surface area it is comparable with the British *civitas* of *Alt Clut*, but it is nearly twice the area of the southern Pictish fort at Dundurn, and eight times that of the Scottish power centre of Dunadd. The discrepancy is even greater than it appears because at these latter mentioned sites much of the overall area consists of crags and rock outcrops quite unsuitable for occupation.

### 13.3.1 The ramparts

Given the major socio-political status implied by these measurements, it is the greater pity that the ramparts which defended the approach to the headland were totally destroyed between 1805 and 1818 when the harbour and town of Burghead were remodelled; that, at that time and later, the remaining ramparts were dug over for good building stone; that excavators of varied degrees of competence have left few intelligible records of where their trenches were sited; and that even General Roy's plan of 1793 is not free from inaccuracies. Add to this the further factor that, from the time of the 16th-century historian Hector Boece up to the present day, Burghead has been the subject of as wild a set of historical fantasies as any stronghold in northern Britain.

Despite these problems, some positive statements can be made. Whatever inaccuracies there may be in detail, Roy's plan can be accepted as evidence for four close-set banks and ditches across the neck of the promontory (illus 56 & 63). The innermost of these was also carried round the headland, and the enclosed area was divided by a medial bank into an upper and a lower fort. This interior division was evidently sited on a pre-existing natural feature, because the interior level of the upper enclosure is about 12m (40ft) above that of the lower one. The construction of an internal bank may mark a deliberate socially conscious division, akin to the *Hauptburg/Vorburg* plans which we have already noticed in Europe (illus 61).

It is doubtful whether all these ramparts form an original unitary work. In particular, the arrangement of close-set multiple ramparts across the neck of a headland is without parallel in the 5th and later centuries AD, whereas it is common enough in pre-Roman forts. It seems probable therefore that the multiple ramparts of Burghead were founded in or before the 1st century BC. On the other hand, the bank around the headland has produced—though not from impeccable contexts—radiometric age-estimates ranging from the 3rd to the 10th centuries AD, suggesting that it was added or altered over that time-span (Edwards & Ralston 1978). We might speculate that the intention was to provide defence against sea-raiders. Around the western side of the promontory, the result was indeed a formidable work: the built rampart was set at the edge of a steep slope over 25m (82ft) high, of which the lower 14m (46ft) was a vertical sea cliff.



63  
Cross-sections and  
elevation (2b) of  
the Burghead  
rampart  
(1: after Young  
1891; 2: after  
Macdonald 1862;  
nb: scale of 2a &  
2b is uncertain).

### The lower headland

We must now turn to the evidence for the structural character of the ramparts around the headland (illus 63). Over a period of some 150 years, at least ten cuttings have been made across the ramparts, but the details of these are so imprecisely stated that they can only be located very approximately. Furthermore, there are such great discrepancies between the several cuttings that it is difficult to know whether they reflect differential erosion and destruction in various parts of the circuit; genuine differences in the builders' intentions; or varying levels of competence on the part of the excavators. The most

striking discrepancy is that between the detailed accounts given by Macdonald in 1862 and Small in 1969 of sections cut apparently close to one another, and certainly across the same stretch of rampart.

Bearing in mind such cautions, it none the less seems reasonable to regard Young's account of his excavations in 1890 and 1892 (Young 1891; 1893), supported as it is by a convincing section and elevation, as classic (illus 63, 1a & 1b). Along the seaward side of the lower enclosure, he found the rampart to be raised on a paving of carefully fitted boulders. The outer face was in the form of a solidly-built revetment up to 0.9m (3ft) wide, and still standing to a height of 2.9m (9ft 7in). The revetment on the inner side of the rampart was 1.07m (3ft 7in) wide. Between these two exceptionally stout revetments was a fill of stones, wood and rubbish. The overall width was about 7.3m (24ft).

Young further states that 'the two facing-walls are joined and strengthened by oak logs'. This statement, however, is at variance with all the other Burghead evidence, and can indeed be refuted from Young's sectional drawing and from his own statement that he traced some of the logs 'fully 12 feet (3.6m) into the rampart'. All other records agree that no timber work was associated with the front face. Young goes on to record that the transverse 'logs were joined across by oak planks and logs, riveted (sic) together by iron bolts'. There are variations in the disposition of the timbers, which may best be understood by reference to Young's own drawings, reproduced here as illustration 63, 1a & 1b. As for dimensions, the logs or beams were 150-230mm (6-9in) square, while the planks were up to 80 x 300mm (3 x 10in).

Though this account may be taken as classic, Young himself recorded a major change in construction about 90m (300ft) to the south. There the appearance was that stones and oak planks were laid in alternate layers; but it is not clear from the description whether these were longitudinal or transverse planks, or whether iron spikes were used. Elsewhere, however, he records a complete absence of timber. The fact that we thus have reports from the same observer of three markedly differing methods of construction argues very strongly for there having been a high degree of variation in the construction.

### The upper fort

Other variations, apparent or real, must now be mentioned. In excavations across the western, seaward, rampart of the upper fort, respectively in 1861 and 1968, Macdonald (1862-3) and Small (1969) make no mention of iron spikes or nails. Moreover, the timber work recorded in section and elevation by Macdonald (illus 63, 2a & 2b), and that reported by Small, was far less—both in quantity and in systematic arrangement—than that uncovered by Young. This has led Small to speculate on a possible difference in date between the upper and lower enclosures, with the upper one being the earlier. The argument is necessarily inconclusive, but the hypothesis is an attractive one.

Small, having referred to the transverse timbers in the inner face of the rampart of the upper fort, also remarked that 'there was considerable evidence that some of the transverse beams had projected from the wall into the interior of the fort'. This is obviously a major witness to the existence of a range of internal buildings, keyed in to the rampart, at least on the west side of the upper fort. Unfortunately, we have no further evidence as to how widely such ranges were distributed around the fort; but the recorded evidence

explains the regular presence of transverse beams in the inner face and their absence from the outer face.



From this account of the rampart structures, we may turn to seek models or parallels for them. This is no easy task. It can be said at once that the forms of timber-lacing reported at Burghead are totally unlike the carpentry framework known at Cadbury Castle, Somerset (Alcock 1995a, 14-23), and at Green Castle, Portknockie (illus 54). Nor do they recall the timber-and-rubble ramparts at *Alt Clut* and Dundurn, though the latter does at least include iron nails. In both these cases, the ramparts have almost totally collapsed as a result of burning, but it is clear that each had a vertical front face in which timber formed a large part.

The absence of timber in the front face, or in the forward part of the Burghead rampart, is also without parallel in timber-laced defences of the pre-Roman Iron Age, whether in Britain or on the Continent (Varley 1948; Cotton 1954). As already remarked, the frequent occurrence of transverse timbers in the rear of the Burghead wall does support the suggestion that internal ranges of buildings had their horizontal timbers keyed into the rear wall. Extensive parallels have been cited for such arrangements in the Iron Age of both Britain and western Europe (Hamilton, 1969). Closer in both space and time to Burghead, we may cite the hypothetical reconstruction of an internal range (based admittedly on rather slight evidence) in the Pictish phase at Urquhart Castle, Inverness-shire (Alcock & Alcock 1992, illus 26).

One other reported feature of the ramparts demands attention: the supposed evidence for some major conflagration, perhaps as a result of hostile action. From the historical evidence set out in section (1) above, the possibility of this would not be surprising. There have in fact been numerous reports, beginning in the early 19th century, of finds of burnt remains of oak logs, half-burned beams of wood, and so on, at Burghead. Since these are intermingled with unbelievable accounts of mortared stonework, they should be received with scepticism. It is particularly noteworthy that Young, in his careful and detailed reports, makes frequent mention of decayed oak, in both the seaward wall of the lower enclosure and the rampart of the upper fort; but none at all of burned timbers.

In fact the only convincing evidence comes from a limited stretch of the perimeter: the western defence of the upper fort. Macdonald refers to 'the action of fire...very evident on the stones here, and large pieces of charcoal...abundant'. These observations are reinforced by Small's comment, following his notice that some transverse beams had projected from the wall face, that 'the charring of these timbers gave the inner face a rather dilapidated appearance' (Small 1969, 64). This is good evidence for the burning of a building set against the wall, whether by enemy design or domestic accident. It would be quite unreasonable to infer anything more elaborate than this.

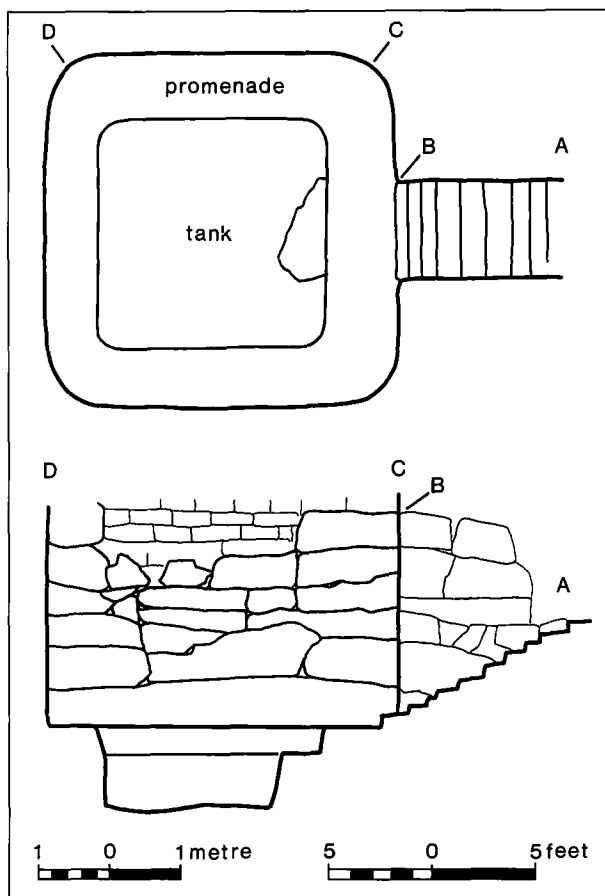
### 13.3.2 The well

Apart from the defences, one other structure at Burghead demands attention. In the lower enclosure, against the rear of the inner cross-headland rampart, a flight of rock-cut steps leads down to a roughly square chamber, with a smaller tank within it (illus 64). This tank, which is permanently water-filled, is certainly hewn out of the living rock. So probably are the lower sides of the chamber, but they are also faced with rather crude

coursed blocks of masonry, which show signs of several repairs. The difference in area between the tank and the chamber-wall leaves a level promenade around the tank (MacDonald 1863, 351-4, with Pl X).

This impressively simple structure has attracted remarkable interpretations: as a Roman bath; the focus of a pagan Celtic water cult; or a place for the bloodless execution of kings. Taken at its most mundane, it might be accepted simply as a water-cistern, necessary at all times for the inhabitants of an otherwise waterless headland, and absolutely essential in times of military threat.

A further suggestion is that it might have been a Christian baptistery, associated with a major 8th-century church appropriate to the high-status site implied by the character of Burghead's defences. The Christian significance of the place is indicated by the discovery of the end slab of a carved slab-shrine (illus 62), comparable with the well-known example from St Andrews (below, 22.2.2). From the remaining fragment it is clear—even allowing for its heavily weathered condition—that the carving of the Burghead shrine was markedly coarser than that at St Andrews. None the less, its hunting scene is one of considerable vigour.



### 13.3.3 The bull stones

Other stones, carved with animals of Pictish Class I, may hint at a pre-Christian cult of bulls. During the destruction of the ramparts across the headland in the making of the early 19th-century harbour and town, some 25-30 such stones were recorded. Only six have survived, however, and only three bull depictions are complete. There are subtle differences between these three, from a bull at rest, through one aroused, to one with hunched shoulders and lowered head ready to charge (illus 62). It may be suggested that the original arrangement was of a procession of bulls, perhaps lining the entrance passage through the multiple ramparts.

Apart from the carved stones, there have been many reports of finds of metal objects, pottery and other artefacts, but only one item of metalwork is known to have survived the widespread diggings and depredation which Burghead has undergone. This is a circular mount of silver, richly decorated with Anglo-Saxon ornament of the 9th century (Macdonald 1863). It is the rim mount for a horn, less probably from a drinking horn than from a blast-horn or bugle, whether for war or hunting. It can only be conjectured how this high status Anglo-Saxon object came to Burghead: as a gift from an Anglo-Saxon king or noble to a Pictish potentate, or in the gear of an English exile, are possible explanations within the customs of the period.

64  
Burghead: the  
enigmatic well (Jill  
Sieveurwright).

## 13.4 FORTS IN ACTION

### 13.4.1 Bamburgh

Two military actions may serve to introduce the topic of military actions at forts. Bede reports that, sometime before AD 651, Penda of Mercia attempted to destroy the royal stronghold, *urbs regia*, of Bamburgh by fire (*HE* iii, 16). This, of course, was merely one incident in the running warfare between Mercia and Northumbria. According to Bede, Penda attempted to set the site on fire by gathering a great quantity of beams and other wood from the vicinity, which were piled up to a great height, *in magna altitudine*, on the landward side of the city. This was presumably done at the southern end of the stronghold, where the near-vertical crags diminish in height. The attempt might have been successful had not the wind shifted direction away from the city and into the face of Penda's army. For Bede, this was a miracle instigated by the prayers of Bishop Aidan. A modern commentator may prefer to think of the diurnal shift from an off-shore wind by day to an on-shore one by night: that is, into the face of the besiegers. However that may be, Penda was unsuccessful in his attempt.

In contrast, the operation mounted against the Dál Riata stronghold of Dunadd in AD 736, as recorded in the Annals of Ulster, was highly successful. This was part of a wider campaign of rapine, *vastatio*, in Dál Riata, waged by Oengus I, son of Fergus, king of the Picts. Oengus not only took possession of Dunadd, but 'bound in chains the two sons of Selbach', the former overlord of the kindred of Lorn and ruler of Dál Riata.

From these and other examples, the obvious inference is that major forts were the residences of royal families, and hence the repositories of their treasure and other wealth, particularly horses. Here also resided many of their followers, of all ranks. In consequence, a fort was a centre of royal power, both military and administrative, as well as a focus of prestige. In an age of annual hostings and endemic warfare between kingdoms, the need for the protection of such centres was evident enough.

The differing sequels to the two incidents related above emphasize the significance of a successful defence of a royal stronghold: it provided a base for the seizure or recovery of territory and power. Oswiu of Northumbria, successfully defending Bamburgh, held on to his kingdom in the face of continued Mercian attacks, and in AD 655 decisively defeated the Mercian army and slew Penda. Oengus, having captured Dunadd, held on to his newly-acquired overlordship of Dál Riata until about 750.

It is easy enough to establish the importance of major forts for the defence of royal centres of power; and by extension, we might infer that lesser potentates occupied lesser forts from which they defended their own treasure and lands. The distinctions made here may, in fact, be inappropriate, in that a lesser potentate may have been a royal minister, holding a defended centre and administering a territory on the king's behalf. The broad principle remains—but a quite different question arises in relation to the use of forts to control movements, whether the hostile movements of cattle raids and other hostings, or innocent bodies of travellers, such as merchants or pilgrims.

In the case of hostile movements, it has long been accepted that these cannot be inhibited or controlled from fortified places. This doctrine owes much to Smail's study (1956) of a well-documented period of military activity, that of crusading warfare in the 11th century AD. In brief, he showed that a stronghold can only control an area within the

effective range of the defenders' weapons. Beyond that range, the garrison must sally out to fight in the open. Correspondingly, a hostile force, especially one aiming at plunder, can move at will, ignoring and by-passing fortified places, as Ecgrith appears to have done in his Pictish campaign in AD 685 (10.1 above). In our period, two factors in particular constrained the fort garrisons: the general shortage of weapons with a range greater than that of a hand-thrown spear; and the siting of forts in elevated locations, to a greater or lesser extent remote from valley-bottom routes.

This doctrine can be accepted in the sense that forts, especially those on elevated sites, might easily be by-passed by an outward-bound hosting. Quite simply, a mounted raiding party could have passed by before a defending force could be assembled and led down to ambush the raiders. But a quite different case would arise for a hosting on its way home, hindered by its booty—in particular slow-moving cattle, and recalcitrant captives. This counter-argument must not be pressed too hard, however. The mere fact that cattle-raiding was endemic suggests that the raiders escaped with their booty more often than not.

#### 13.4.2 *Alt Clut*

There is, however, one well-documented case which reveals how the fall of an important fort can facilitate a major raid: that of *Alt Clut* in 870. The Annals of Ulster record that, in that year, 'Amlaib (Olafr) and Imar (Ivarr), two kings of the Norsemen from Dublin, laid siege to the fortress [of *Alt Clut/Aile Chuaithe*] and at the end of four months they destroyed and plundered it'. In the following year they returned from Scotland (Alba) with 200 ships and a great prey of Angles, Britons and Picts.

It would appear from this that the two experienced warrior kings considered that there was a large booty of slaves available in Scotland; that the existence of *Alt Clut* prevented access to that booty; and that it was therefore worth pressing a long siege to a successful conclusion. The result of the destruction of *Alt Clut* was that the major waterways of the middle and upper Clyde, and of the river Leven and Loch Lomond, were opened up, as well as the whole of the central lowlands.

#### 13.4.3 Strategic roles

The question whether forts might act as collecting points for tolls and tribute is more difficult to answer. Indeed, there appears to be no direct evidence on this. We must first consider the related question of how much travel by merchants, craftsmen and pilgrims actually took place. There is good evidence that men of religion were great travellers, and this was presumably also true of pilgrims. Moreover, it will appear below that close comparison of techniques and motifs in metalwork, and of images in sculpture, argue strongly for the movement of craftsmen. We may also expect there to have been some traffic in raw materials such as hides and pelts.

All these are likely to have attracted the attention of rapacious rulers and lords. Some forts would have been particularly well-placed to exact tribute, especially those set in narrow valleys which served as major routes. A good example would be Dundurn, Perthshire, overlooking the E-W route along Strathearn, which branched both north and south at Lochearnhead. Likewise, forts beside narrow sea-passages, such as Dunollie, might hope to impose tolls on passing ships. This source of revenue for fort-dwellers is

obviously conjectural; but it may gain some support from the example (albeit anachronistic) of the proliferation of medieval castles, high above the Rhine gorge, as collectors of river tolls.

### 13.5 CRANNOGS AND ISLAND SITES

Crannogs are essentially artificial islands, created in lakes and swamps by building up layers of stones, clay, brushwood and larger timbers. The whole mass may then be pinned down with large numbers of vertical piles, and buildings were then erected on the platform. Small islands in inland and sea lochs may also be improved for settlement in this way, and may therefore be included in this class. Sometimes the crannog is linked by a built causeway (which may be under the surface of the water), but in other cases the only land access may have been by boat. The intention is plainly for protection, and these sites are therefore included in the present chapter (useful general account, Morrison 1985).

In Ireland, crannogs are very common, and have a long chronological range. In the Early Historic period they may be royal seats, or the sites of metal-smiths' workshops (Edwards 1990, 34-41; Bradley 1993, 74-81). In Scotland, their building and occupation appear to begin before 500 BC, but they are most common in the second half of that last millennium BC. They continue through the Roman centuries, and at least four are dated broadly to the third quarter of the 1st millennium AD (Barber & Crone 1993, fig. 1 and Table 1). Of these, two are the major excavated crannogs at Buiston in Ayrshire and in Loch Glashan, Argyll. A main archaeological interest of these sites lies in the preservation through waterlogging of domestic buildings and household objects; and fuller accounts and discussions of them are therefore presented in appropriate chapters. Small islands in both sea and inland lochs were also favoured settings for lairds' castles throughout the middle ages (eg Loch Leven).

The exploration of these has sometimes produced artefacts of 5th- to 7th-century date, evidence for occupations of which no other trace remains. The most spectacular instance of this is the discovery of a hanging-bowl of probable 7th-century date on the crannog at Buiston. There is also a more fragmentary bowl from a tidal island off the Moidart coast, on which Castle Tioram was later built. The bowl, which has stylistic connections at the north-eastern end of the Great Glen, is evidence for a high-status occupation of the island, possibly religious rather than secular (Stevenson 1976a, 249-50; below, 19.1.2). It also reinforces the importance of the Great Glen as a major line of communication (illus 7 above). A lesser object, but still chronologically significant in this context, is a fragment from an Irish glass bangle found at Fraoch Eilean, in Loch Awe, later the site of a medieval castle (Stevenson 1976b, 53).

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## PART 3 • TAIL-PIECE

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Part Three has attempted to survey the mental, material and practical aspects of warfare. A few general comments may usefully conclude this Part.

Revisionist and pacifist historians may find it difficult to understand the Heroic ethos and its conventions. It is useful, therefore, to be able to quote a very modern (1991) statement as to why men fight:

‘War alone presents man with the opportunity...of putting everything at risk...It is the stakes that can make a game serious, even noble...The only way to account for [its] fascination is to regard war as the game with the highest stakes of all’ (Van Creveld 1991, 85).

This would seem to put war at the level of an extreme example of a socially-acceptable high-risk adventure sport: perhaps slightly more dangerous than motor-cycle racing or Himalayan mountaineering. Very probably this was how it was seen by the drink-sodden warband of Gododdin, or teenage tearaways like Guthlac: that is, by the warrior elite.

But Heroic warfare was a bloody activity, pursued by blood-thirsty men. In *Y Gododdin* we read of blood-stained swords and spears, of blood on a warrior’s cheek, ‘blades full of cruelty’, ‘a blood-bath and death for his adversary’. Taliesin, when bard at the court of Cynan Garwyn of Powys, related that ‘The men of Gwent were slaughtered with red blade’. Among the poems attributed to him following his move to the court of Rheged are numerous references to blood-stained men and garments. The sequel to the battle of Argoed Llwyfain was that ‘ravens were red with the blood of men’.

Obviously, in citing these bardic references, we must make allowance for the poetic heightening of the character of warfare. But the prose of Stephen and Bede is no less impressive in terms of the level of bloodshed. Stephen, reporting on Ecgrith’s suppression of a Pictish rebellion early in his reign, describes the slaughter which Ecgrith wrought, reputedly so great that two rivers were filled with corpses. Over these, *quod mirum dictu est*, ‘a marvel to relate’, the Northumbrians were able to pursue the Picts dry-shod, and thus continue the slaying (*VW*, 19).

Less colourfully, but no less impressively, Bede reports early in the *Ecclesiastical History* that almost all of the army of Áedán, son of Gabráin was slain at *Degsastan*. In the same battle, Theobald, brother of the Northumbrian king Æthelfrith, was killed along with his warband (*HE* i, 34). In the battle of Winwaed, in addition to the Mercian Penda himself, Bede relates that nearly 30 of his war-leaders (*duces regii*) were killed as well as Æthelhere, the East Anglian king, and his men (*HE* iii, 24). It is characteristic of our sources, whether prose or poetry, that emphasis is on the casualties of the nobility. Some of these instances may be dismissed as examples of the *topos*, or conventional expectation, that men should die with their lord (Woolf 1976, 63-81).

In Bede's own lifetime, however, the Pictish victory over Ecgrith at Nechtansmere led to the death not only of the king but of the greater part of his expeditionary force, *cum maxima parte copiarum* (*HE* iv, 26). In this case, Bede is very probably including all ranks. Nechtansmere is a classic example of a defeated army, caught far from home. For them, there is no choice but to stand, and fight, and die. We may wonder whether the Pictish victors had a proverb similar to that of the Britons: 'he who may not retreat is doomed' (cited by Sims-Williams 1994, 90).

We may reasonably conclude that, in expeditions other than the annual cattle-raid (which no doubt was a high-risk adventure), men slew and were slain, not in tens, probably not in thousands, but certainly in hundreds; and that all ranks in society from kings and nobles to base-clients or free peasants were involved. So far as the enemy dead were concerned, we realise from the contemporary Northumbrian sources that these were not regarded as human beings, but sinful and infidel Britons, cruel and pagan Mercians, and bestial and ferocious Picts.

Moreover, the warband may be seen as a full-time professional military elite, while the able-bodied free peasantry were a part-time—but none the less regular—army. The military system was supported by the entire productive capacity of the land: basic maintenance, and supplementary rewards of fine clothing, jewellery, mead, for the warband; a bag of meal from his own land for the foot-soldier on a hosting. Finally, in the ravagings of Æthelfrith, or Cadwallon, or Oengus, or Ecgrith, the whole population suffered, and none more so than the women and children. Britain did not have to wait until 1914 to experience warfare which might genuinely be described as 'total' (*pace* Dockrill 1994, 9).

## PART FOUR

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### THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY

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**T**he previous two sections have described the social structures and activities which formed the basis for life in northern Britain during our period. It is now time to look in more detail at the physical structures—enclosures, halls, houses and churches—created at that time which so far have appeared merely as a back-drop to the activities of the kings, warriors and priests described.

At this point, a note of caution must be introduced. Throughout much of this book, the evidence for the topics which are considered has been long known and much discussed. Consequently, when new interpretations are proposed, there is a solid body of scholarship behind them. This is not necessarily the case, however, when we wish to consider the settlements and buildings which comprise Chapter 16 in particular. Over the past quarter of a century, aerial photography has massively increased the available evidence, and has thus potentially revolutionized our knowledge. But the emphasis must be on 'potential'. It is probably true to say that, although small packets of information have been released, the majority of air-photographs are as yet unpublished. Even when published, the classification and dating of air-photograph sites must normally remain in doubt pending excavation.

This is a particular embarrassment for our study, because many of those soils in north-east England and much of eastern Scotland which were particularly favourable for early farming and settlement prove to be equally favourable for crop-mark photography (of relevance here, for example, see Brown 1983; Maxwell 1987; RCAHMS 1994, 41-75). As photographs come to be published, so it becomes necessary to modify existing interpretations in order to accommodate new levels of population density and even new types of monument. At lordly levels, too, it must be borne in mind that the interpretation of the major sites at Milfield and Sprouston still await confirmation, and above all, chronological assessment by means of excavation.

Having mentioned the need to assess air photographs on the basis of excavation, it has to be admitted that a further obstacle to the advance of knowledge about settlements and buildings is the frequency of delays between the completion of an excavation and its publication. This is exacerbated by the increasing demands for specialist reports especially on artefacts and on the site environment. Pending a final report, a scholar who attempts to write a state-of-the-art synthesis has to make do with brief interim reports, normally unillustrated, and with the expectation that the final conclusions may differ significantly from the interim reports. On such a frail basis rest many of the statements made in this section.



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## CENTRES OF POWER & ADMINISTRATION

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### 14.1 PEACEFUL ROLES OF FORTS

Part Three concentrated on warfare as a—indeed, perhaps *the*—principal social activity in Early Historic northern Britain. In response to this emphasis on warfare in contemporary prose and poetry, most large and middle-sized secular sites have so far been treated as enclosed places, with the plain implication that they had been built for defence: in other words, for a war-like purpose. But contemporary accounts may also present these sites in quite other terms, and thereby open up new horizons in our understanding of their function and status.

#### 14.1.1 The forts of *Alt Clut*, Bamburgh, Dunbar and Lindisfarne

The two major secular places which Bede mentions contemporaneously in the north are *Alcluith* (*Alt Clut*), which he correctly translates as Rock of Clyde (illus 10 above); and a place which he identifies as having been named after the 6th-century Bernician queen Bebbe, and which elsewhere appears as *Bebbanburh*. The first of these we have become familiar with as *Alt Clut* or Dumbarton and the other as Bamburgh (illus 12 above).

In each case, there is a military implication: *Alcluith* is described as *munitissima*, strongly defended; and *Bebbanburh* was an objective for a Mercian ravaging expedition, in which Penda endeavoured, in vain, to destroy it by fire. But in each case, Bede also uses the words *civitas* and *urbs*. We may wonder, fruitlessly, what words a Classical Roman might have used of these two craggy lumps. What we can say is that, while both words are used widely in southern Britain by Bede and other contemporary writers, Bamburgh and Dumbarton are the only cases of *civitas* being applied to sites which had no trace of a substantial or significant Roman presence. The same is true of *urbs*, with the addition of two other northern British examples: *Coludi urbs*/*Coludes burh* (St Abbs), a large cliff-top fort later used as a monastery; and *urbs Giudi*, an unidentified site somewhere near the Firth of Forth (James 1979). We may perhaps assume that, although these northern sites lacked visible Roman remains such as those at Carlisle and York, nonetheless some special status attached to them.

Indeed, in the case of Bamburgh, it is made clear that the status in question is that of royalty. The eponymous Bebbe was believed (perhaps rightly) to have been the first queen of Æthelfrith, the great Bernician warrior-king, eulogised by Bede himself (*HE* i, 34). In each of Bede's three references to Bamburgh, whether as *civitas* or *urbs*, he adds the adjective *regia*, royal. Perhaps for Bede, the most important aspect of that royalty was that a hand and arm of the saintly Oswald, rescued from his defeat and dismemberment, were preserved at Bamburgh in a silver casket (*HE* iii, 6).

Further aspects of the possible non-military function of an *urbs* are revealed in Stephen's *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*. The unruly bishop was imprisoned in AD 680, on the orders of King Ecgfrith, firstly in charge of *praefectus nomine Osfrith, qui praeerat Inbroninis urbi*

*regis*; and secondly, *in urbem suam* (ie Ecgfrith's) *Dynbaer praefectum nomine Tydlin*, who is further described as more cruel than Osfrith. The term *praefectus* has already been discussed above in Chapter 5. There it was demonstrated that it may be used of persons of very high rank, and it may therefore be suggested that in these two cases, the title 'City Prefect' might be appropriate.

Where were these two royal cities, each in the charge of a royal official, and each with facilities to imprison a powerful and turbulent bishop? In the case of *Dynbaer*, there is no dispute that it was Dunbar, now a small harbour town on the coast of East Lothian (illus 69 below); nor that the name is originally a British one, meaning something like 'ridge-' or 'summit-fort'. In the 11th and 12th centuries Dunbar 'was almost certainly a shire-centre'; and at that period, *urbs* might be regarded as signifying either or both of 'the centre by itself or the centre and its district taken together'. It had indeed become the seat of a 'comital dynasty' (Barrow 1973, 66-7 with n 296). It is, however, a matter of surmise, rather than of historical proof, whether or not the office of Earl of Dunbar had descended directly from the *praefectus* of the 7th century.

The identification of *Inbroninis*, or more correctly *in Broninis*, has caused difficulty in the past. More recently, however, *Broninis* has been recognized as a British compound word with several possible interpretations, among them 'breast-shaped island' (GRJ Jones 1990). A clear candidate for this is Holy Island or Lindisfarne, with its upstanding, mammiform castle hill (col illus I.3; accessible account in O'Sullivan & Young 1995, 89-99). The visible remains are principally of the early 20th century, overlying a much modified 16th-century fort. It may be suggested that these had totally obliterated a 7th-century dry-stone citadel in which Wilfrid had been imprisoned. This surmise is strengthened firstly by the fact that on the lower slopes of the hill there appear to be traces of the outworks of a hierarchical fort, appropriate to a 7th-century citadel. Secondly, an early name for the castle-hill was Beblowe, and this suggests an original *Bebbanhlaw*, echoing the name of Bamburgh, *Bebbanburh* (GRJ Jones 1990, 130).

About 45 years before Wilfrid's imprisonment in *Broninis*, the newly victorious King Oswald had requested that the Iona community should send a bishop to preach and minister to the English. On the arrival of Aidan as bishop, Oswald gave him a place for an episcopal see on the island of Lindisfarne, so Bede relates (*HE* iii, 3). Over the following years, the monastic community on Lindisfarne received wide grants of land in eastern Bernicia from the Tees to the Firth of Forth (map in Morris 1977, 89). But the imprisonment of Wilfrid makes it clear that the *urbs regis*, with its citadel of *Bebbanhlaw*, had not been part of the royal gift to the community.

It has already been noticed that Stephen had added the further term, *castella*, to *urbs* and *civitas* for a fortified centre with what we might broadly call social and administrative purposes (*VW*, 39; above 5.1.2). In the *Life of Wilfrid*, the context was that of royal circuits or progresses, intended in part to display the royal person, and to fulfil the royal obligation of hospitality to the king's followers. Bede records similar progresses undertaken by Edwin and his officers (*cum ministris*: *HE* ii, 16). The further role of royal centres, whether fortified or not (as at Yeavering and Milfield; below Chapter 15) was to receive the food renders which supported both the king and the administration of the kingdom (fuller account above 5.1.2).



I.1  
Map of Glen Urquhart from General  
Roy's Military Survey (1747-55),  
denoting settlements in red, cultivation  
in yellow (with indication of rigs) and  
woodland in green  
(*British Museum*)

I.2  
A view of Iona  
(*Historic Scotland*)

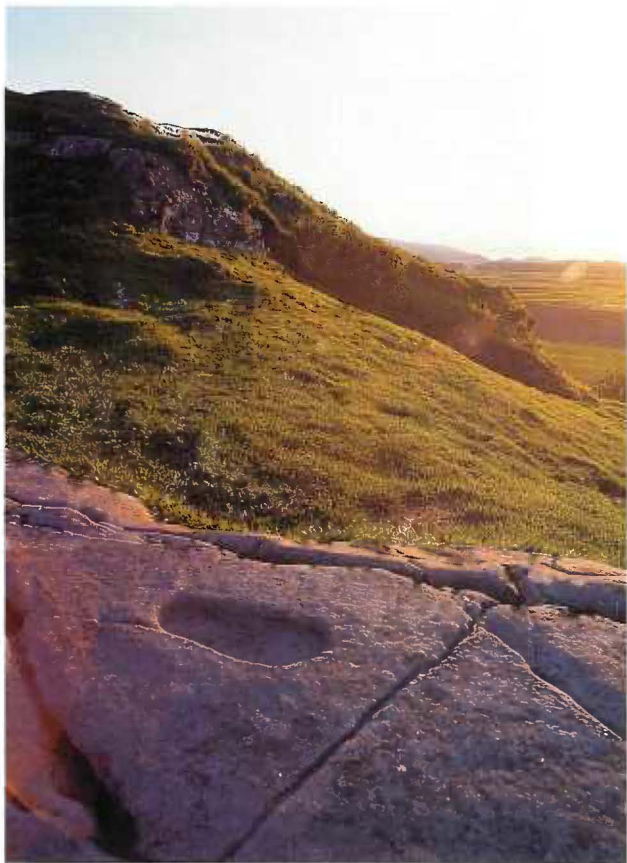




I.3  
Sueno's Stone,  
Forres, Moray: the  
pictorial face of the  
great cross-slab  
(viewed before  
erection of the  
present glass  
shelter)  
(*Historic Scotland*)



I.4  
Broninis, 'Breast Island',  
Lindisfarne  
(*Photo: Mick Sharp*)



I.5  
A hilltop  
inauguration place:  
the rock-carved  
footprint at  
Dunadd, Argyll  
(*Historic Scotland*)

I.6  
Eagle-headed  
mounts from lyres:  
above, Taplow;  
below, Sutton Hoo  
(*British Museum*)





I.7 (above and above right)  
Escutcheons from the Sutton Hoo  
great hanging-bowl illustrating enamel-  
and millefiori-work  
(*British Museum*)

I.8  
Hunterston, Ayrshire, masterpiece  
of the metalworker's art, the great  
pseudo-penannular brooch  
(*National Museums of Scotland*)



I.9  
St Cuthbert's  
pectoral cross  
(*Durham Cathedral Library*)



### 14.1.2 The iconology of forts

The identification of the 'breast' of *Broninis* with the mammiform hill of *Bebbanhlaw* introduces, albeit speculatively, the topic of a possible iconology of hill-top forts. The concept of *bron*/breast as a source of nourishment (Jones 1990, 125) may be extended to the wider concept of motherhood, with its implications of protection as well as nourishment. An example in the English Peak District is Mam Tor (altitude 517m [1680ft]), a peak crowned by a prehistoric hillfort, which dominates the great ridge separating Edale from the Hope valley.

The outstanding example of a named peak, however, is the Mither Tap (ie Mother Top) of Bennachie, Gordon (altitude 518m (1700ft)). The basic geological feature of the hill is a massive granite tor, against which the fort abuts. In itself the fort is quite small, comprising two widely-separated dry-stone ramparts enclosing an oval area with a maximum diameter of about 60m (200ft), and with a triangular annexe beside the entrance. There are traces of circular huts against the inner face of each rampart (WD Simpson 1943, 60-1). It has been suggested that the plan implies an Early Historic date (Shepherd 1986, 135).

The Mither Tap can be seen over a considerable area between the rivers Don and Urie, and is intervisible with a number of hillforts. WD Simpson has described the 'beautiful outline' of Bennachie, 'culminating in the strikingly graceful Mither Tap' (1943, 60). This is a sophisticated appreciation, with its roots in landscape Romanticism. We can only speculate on how the original builders might have seen it; but from several angles the conical peak presents a strikingly breast-like appearance, with the tor as an obvious nipple. Indeed, seen in silhouette from the east, the appearance is that of a recumbent female in a fairly advanced state of pregnancy. Following this line, we might further speculate whether the fort was built to protect the material realization of a Mother Goddess.

While the very names of *Broninis*, Mam Tor, and Mither Tap invite such symbolic analyses of these three mammiform hills, there are others with similar profiles but without such evocative names. Two examples may be cited here: Arthur's Seat to the south of Edinburgh; and East Lomond. Arthur's Seat rises from a short spur, known as The Lion's Haunch, to a conical summit at the altitude of 251m (824ft). Both the Lion's Haunch and Arthur's Seat itself are largely protected by cliffs on the south and the west, but on the east the approach has been closed by a double rampart. The date of this is quite uncertain, but its character 'may suggest a "dark age" date' (RBK Stevenson 1947, 165-8).

East Lomond is another conical hill, with a slightly flattened summit at an altitude of 524m (1720ft), which stands towards the eastern end of an elevated ridge about 7.5 miles (12km) long. To the north it looks out over the rich lands of the Howe of Fife, while to the south it can be seen over a minor ridge, and across the Firth of Forth, for a distance of some 20 miles (30km). Much of the summit is occupied by a denuded, possibly Bronze-age cairn, surrounded by triple ramparts which seem out of all proportion to the area enclosed. This prompts the thought that it was the cairn itself which was the focus of the defences. A secondary (or tertiary?) phase is indicated by the discovery on the hill of a small stone plaque incised in Pictish style with an anatomically-correct steer (ie a castrate) (Corrie 1926; RCHMS 1933, 143; Walker & Ritchie 1987, 165-6, with illus on p 166).

Other forts, though not on hills with strikingly mammiform profiles, were built on hills of such an elevation as to seem inconvenient. Two examples with Early Historic phases may be cited in southern Scotland: Tynron Doon, Dumfries-shire, at 289m (948ft) altitude (illus 55), and Ruberslaw, Roxburghshire, at 424m (1390ft). The first, probably founded in the Pre-Roman Iron Age, has yielded a fragment of a gold filigree ornament and also iron knives probably of 7th-/8th-century AD date (Williams 1971; Stell 1986, 122). The defences of Ruberslaw were built partly of re-used Roman masonry (Curle 1905; RCAHMS 1956, 102-5). The common feature of both is that they have distinctive profiles, which can be seen and recognized over considerable distances.

This is also true of the five mammiform hillforts already discussed, as well as many others: all that has been presented here is a brief but detailed list of examples. They prompt the thought that here is another example of the need for the visibility of kings and other potentates. Subjectively, that attribute worked in two directions: the peasant looked up to the king in his fort, while the all-seeing eye of the king looked down on the peasantry. It must also be recognized that this might also apply to forts which are not at any significant altitude, but which none the less dominate their vicinity because of their rugged character: *Alt Clut* and Dundurn are obvious examples.

#### 14.1.3 Forts as centres of metalworking

Two other aspects of the peaceful roles of fortified places deserve discussion here. The first is the association of high quality metalworking with royal forts: most notably in our area of study, Dunadd (Nieke & Duncan 1988; Nieke 1993; Campbell & Lane 1993; 2000). The association itself is abundantly clear; but doubts may be cast on its significance, and on the suggestion that the fort gave a king control over the production of jewellery—especially brooches—which he could then give as rewards to his subordinates.

The doubts are essentially epistemological: how might we demonstrate the exclusiveness of the relation between royal forts and fine metalworking? The answer is that we cannot. The example of Eligius, gold- and jewel-smith and moneyer to Merovingian kings, at work with his house-slave in a hole in the ground (below, 19.3.4), makes it plain that the *atelier* of a master craftsman might be discoverable only by the greatest good fortune. We can indeed display evidence for some metalworking on forts with definite royal associations (*Alt Clut*, Dunadd, Dunollie), or where we might infer such associations (Dundurn); but we have this body of information because of a sustained programme of excavation on historically-recorded enclosed places, which by that very fact were likely to be royal. In other words, the evidence is heavily skewed in favour of sites of the highest status.

To counter this bias, we must consider the admittedly meagre evidence from sites of lesser status. In Argyll, the duns of Ardifuir (RCAHMS 1988, 171-2) and Kildonan (Fairhurst 1939, 211; RCAHMS 1971, 88-9) have both yielded fragments of crucibles and moulds. In south-west Scotland, recent excavations, at an exhaustive level, on Buiston crannog, have rightly deflated this author's attempt to create a large—and therefore high status—house there (Alcock 1993). The current view is to see Buiston 'as the habitation of a wealthy freeman farmer'. The evidence for metalworking 'consists of fragments of copper alloy sheets, stone ingot moulds and three crucibles' (Crone 1999).

The most enigmatic metalworking site within our scope is that on Mote of Mark, where

the enclosed area is less than 40% of that of the citadel at Dunadd, without reckoning the area of the outworks. When the metalworking evidence from both the excavations in 1913 (Curlie 1914), and more recent ones is fully published (Laing & Longley forthcoming), it may be expected to rival that from Dunadd. It is difficult to see Mote of Mark in the late 7th and 8th centuries as anything other than a major *atelier* for high-grade metalworking; but the question of who the patrons were is unanswerable on the available evidence.



From the last four paragraphs, no clear picture has emerged about connections between kings and metalworking, about the role of brooch-giving in establishing bonds between higher and lower ranks in society, or about the status of craftsmen. This, I believe, is a true reflection of the actual state of our knowledge. Negative though it may seem, it is intended as a caution against the ready importation into northern Britain of models of society which have been formulated elsewhere, but for which there is no evidence in the area of this study.

#### 14.1.4 The role of the forts in controlling trade

Another topic of interest is that of the role of forts in attracting imports, including wine, glass vessels, and ceramic tableware, and in controlling the exchange of such exotic items with local products. The map of the known distribution of imports in northern Britain (above, illus 20) emphasizes very strongly the western pattern; and this could be extended down both shores of the Irish Sea, into the Severn Estuary, and along the Cornish peninsula. Given the origins of the imports, this west-coast distribution causes no surprise. The easterly distribution is very meagre both in number of find-spots and number of objects north of the Forth. It represents secondary movements along the Great Glen, and along other valleys linked by relatively low passes through the mountains.

A further examination of the map suggests that a major role in controlling imports and exchange was played by high-status forts, notably Dunollie, Dunadd and Dumbarton. Does this simply reflect late 20th-century research interests, or has it a genuine significance for 6th- to 8th-century trade? Obviously, the imports have to be present in order to be discovered by excavators; but beyond that, it is not possible to make numerical comparisons between excavated sites because of the wide discrepancies between the duration and intensity of individual excavations. Moreover, it appears—perhaps not surprisingly—that the recovered quantity of any class of artefact may be quite erratic between one excavation and another. For example, the casual and ill-recorded exploration of the small inland fort of Castlehill Dalry in 1901 yielded sherds from three glass vessels (Smith 1919; illus 58 this volume): the same number was found in two seasons of controlled excavation on the major site of *Alt Clut*/Dumbarton.

In attempting numerical comparisons, a particular problem is posed by the two south-western sites, Mote of Mark and Whithorn, each of which has an extended range of imports, and exceptional quantities of Gaulish pottery (classes D and E) and glass. It might be argued that the location of these sites on or near the Solway Firth makes them prime targets for imports: but Mote of Mark is on a difficult estuary, while Whithorn is not even on the coast. Moreover, Whithorn is not a royal fort, but an ecclesiastical site with secular suburbs, while the Mote is so small that it is difficult to see it as anything other than an enclosed *atelier*.

The significance of these observations is that coastal forts had no exclusive control over imports and exchange. It is nonetheless relevant to stress the particular advantages enjoyed by Dumbarton and Dunollie for the dispersal of imports and the gathering of potential exports. Both were beside sheltered harbours. Dumbarton had immediate access to the Firth of Clyde and its islands, and inland to the fertile lowlands and upland grazing of the Clyde valley. To the north, easy portages linked Loch Lomond to eastward running rivers, which lead to places such as Dundurn and Clatchard Craig. Dunollie had immediate access by sea—or sea and land—to Mull and ultimately Iona, as well as to the islands of the Firth of Lorn. To the north-east, Loch Linnhe led to the Great Glen with its string of lochs, and so through to the North Sea. Dunadd, however, lacks the advantage of a site actually on the coast, which today is a little less than three miles (4.5km) distant. The nearest water is the Add, which meanders past the eastern foot of the hill, and across the Moine Mhor (Great Moss) to the small sea-loch of Crinan. It would, of course, have been possible to paddle or pole small boats on the Add.

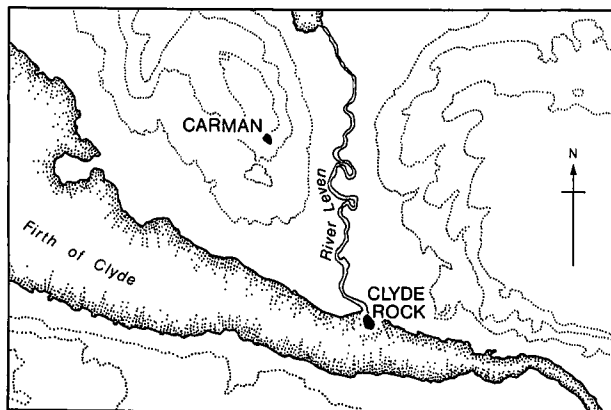
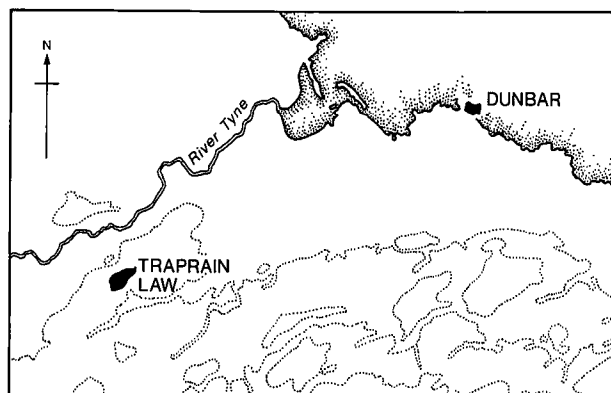
65

Possible coastward movements from inland forts: above, from Traprain Law to Dunbar; below, from Carman to *Alt Clut* (Clyde Rock), Dumbarton.



These detailed observations in western Scotland may now be examined in the context of Britain as a whole. It has been argued that, when we consider the distribution of British hillforts in the wide sense of the term (eg Hogg 1975; 1979), there is a marked difference in western and northern Britain between the pre-Roman Iron Age and the Early

Historic period. Especially in the case of large and medium forts, there is a very marked reduction in the ratio of inland forts to those within three miles (5km) of tidal waters. It was further suggested that this shift was a response to trading ventures from the Mediterranean and western Gaul; and that the coastal and near-coastal sites in Britain might be compared with the chronologically-overlapping class of emporia, which had been widely studied along the coasts of north-west Europe (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 119 ff).



0 6 miles  
0 8 kms

Two explicit examples of moves to the coast may be suggested (illus 65). On a spur about 4½ miles (7km) to the NNW of Clyde Rock, and at an altitude of around 230m (750ft), stands a fort, Carman, with a citadel and large abutting enclosure about 150m (500ft) across. In default of excavation the date of Carman is unknown, but its hierarchical plan suggests an Early Historic date. It is tempting to think that Carman could not have coexisted with *Alt Clut*; and therefore that it was replaced by the larger coastal fort, Bede's *civitas munitissima* (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 101-3). More tentatively, it might be suggested that the great Votadinian hillfort of Traprain Law, abandoned in the mid-5th century, was likewise replaced by the coastal fort—and ultimately harbour-town—of Dunbar.

### 14.1.5 Forts as venues for royal inaugurations

The associations between kings and Early Historic forts have been referred to frequently in this sub-chapter. Another aspect of the association is the role of forts as royal inauguration places. Two examples may be cited: Dunadd and Dundurn. At Dunadd, on the rock surface of a terrace immediately below the citadel, is a group of rock carvings including a rock-cut basin 0.25m (10in) in diameter, two human footprints (col illus I.4), a boar in a Pictish style, and an unintelligible ogam inscription (RCAHMS 1988, 157-9). Martin Martin, writing in the early 18th century, reports that at Finlaggan there was 'a deep Impression made to receive the Feet of MackDonald' on the occasion of his crowning as King of the Isles. From this and other examples, it is generally considered that the footprints had featured in a royal inauguration ceremony (Martin 1716, 241; Hamilton 1968, 151-6). If the 'Pictishness' of the boar-carving is accepted, it suggests that a Pictish king was involved; and this in turn would recall the seizure of Dunadd in 736 by the Pictish king Oengus I, who probably ruled Dál Riata as well as Pictland until c 750 (BD, 187).



66  
Hilltops as possible inauguration places: Dundurn: in silhouette against the lower Earn valley.

Dundurn is a less certain case. At the summit of the pyramidal hill on which the fort was built is a boss of bare rock (illus 66), in which a wide ledge has been laboriously carved. It is possible that this was done in order to ease the timbers of the defences across an inconvenient protrusion. The visual effect, however, is that of a rock seat, traditionally known as St Fillan's Chair. It is widely visible from the valley floor, and it is not fanciful to suggest that it was an inauguration seat for the Early Historic rulers of Strathearn (Alcock *et al* 1989, 198).

## 14.2 STEPS TOWARDS URBANISM

### 14.2.1 Introductory

The history of towns in Scotland has largely been regarded as beginning with the royal creation of burghs in the 12th and 13th centuries, with the royal charter being the main instrument. A more innovative approach has been to examine the development of the economic prerequisites of towns, back into the 10th century (Spearman 1988). Within the chronological frame of the present survey, however, it is necessary to examine the development (or otherwise) of places designated as *urbs* by the Latin writers of the early 8th century.

In fact, four out of five of these places may be dismissed as progenitors of high medieval urbanism. The *Coludi urbs* of Bede (*HE* iv, 19; iv, 25) is called *Colodaesburg* by Stephen

67

The topography of  
Dunbar:

- B = site of 16th-century Blockhouse;  
C = probable Anglian church;  
D = ditch;  
DC = medieval castle;  
E = area of archaeological excavation;  
H = harbour, extended in 19th century;  
RS = rock spine  
(Angie Townsend).

(*VW*, 39). This can be identified as the earthen cliff-top fort on Kirk Hill, St Abbs, Berwickshire (Alcock *et al* 1989; illus 56 this volume), which was given by Oswald to his sister Æbbe to found a monastery. (On a personal note, this was on the last headland along the Northumbrian coast from which Æbbe could have seen her brother's fortress of Bamburgh). It would appear that Bede had Latinised the vernacular *burg* as *urbs*, with no social implications.

Ecgrith's royal *urbs Inbroninis*, identified with the prominent fortified hill at *Bebbanhlaw* on Holy Island (see above 14.1.1), was certainly strong enough to contain the unruly Bishop Wilfrid, in the charge of a royal officer described as *praefectus* (*VW*, 36; for the office, see chap 5). We have no further information about the fortifications until the 16th century, at which time the secular population of Holy Island was described as a village of poor fishermen (O'Sullivan & Young 1995).

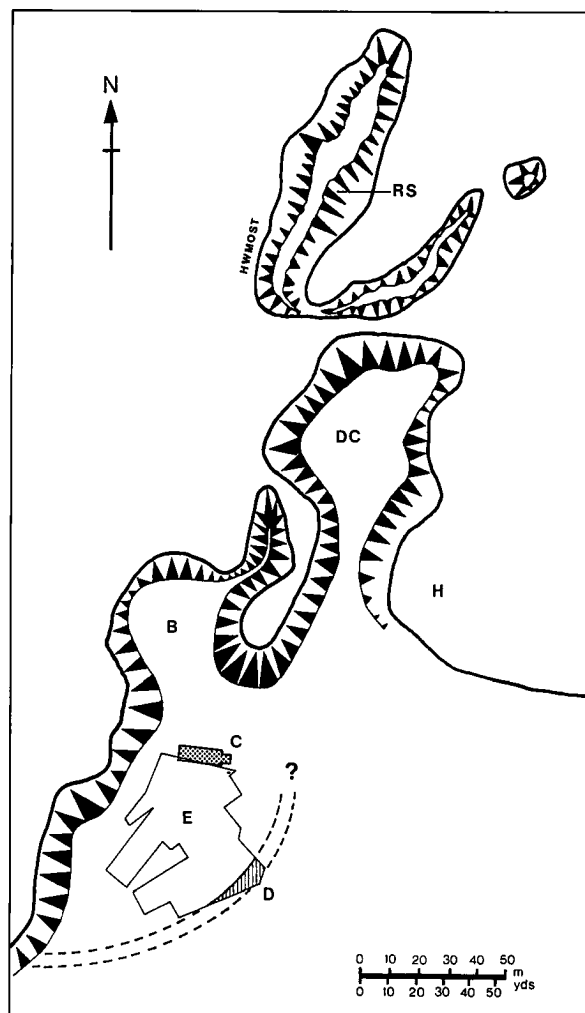
Bamburgh is designated by Bede as both *urbs* (*HE* iii, 16) and *civitas* (*HE* iii, 12), in each case qualified as royal (*regia*). Apart from housing the holy relics of Oswald, saint and king, it is twice noticed in terms which imply a fortified place (*HE* iii, 16; *VW*, 60;

illus 56). It has indeed been suggested that the area of about 2ha (5 acres) was quite large enough 'for a town of Ida's time [ie mid-6th century]...palace, town and stronghold all in one...but in Norman times the castle occupied the whole area of the rock' (Brewer 1925, 245). Indeed it seems that, rather than forming the focus of a medieval borough, nothing more than a small village grew up beneath the castle walls.

Castle Rock, Dumbarton, *Alt Clut*, is twice described by Bede as *urbs*, and once as *civitas munitissima* (strongly fortified; *HE* i, 1; i, 12). We have a firm terminus for the site in the early Historic period from the account in the Annals of Ulster of its destruction by Vikings in AD 870. The written account of its plundering is amply supported by the archaeological evidence for burning (Alcock & Alcock 1990). The next documentary reference is in a charter of Alexander II, founding a burgh at his new castle at Dumbarton in July 1222 (MacPhail 1979, 9). The abrupt change of name from *Alt Clut* (Clyde Rock) to *Dun Breatann* (Fort of the Britons) strongly suggests that after the Viking plundering of 870 there was a complete hiatus. Alexander II's building of a castle and founding of a burgh in 1222 demonstrates the introduction, at the hands of the king, of the new military, social and economic arrangements of the High Middle Ages.

#### 14.2.2 Dunbar: Anglian town

Our fifth example is recorded by Stephen as *urbs*



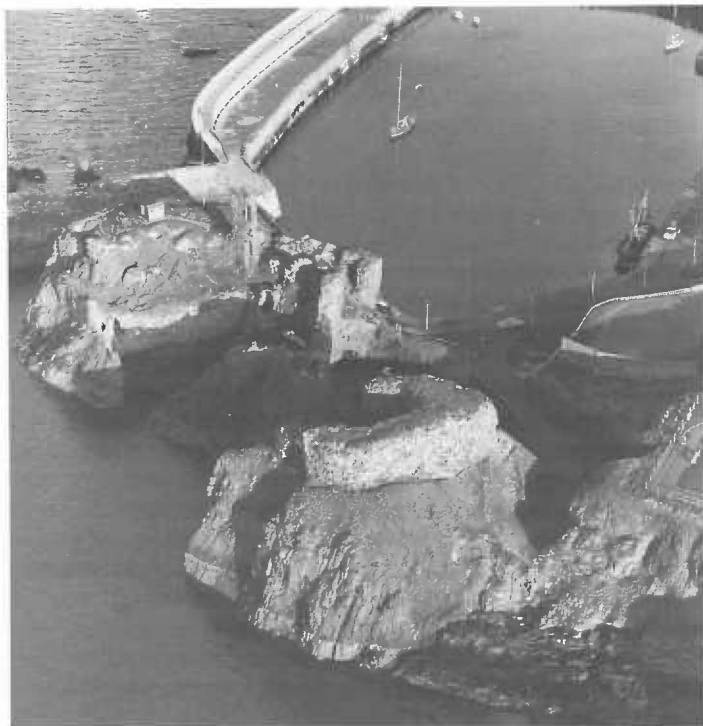
*sua Dynbaer* (VW, 38), that is 'his (ie Ecgrith's) town of Dynbaer'. This is identified as the harbour town of Dunbar (illus 67). It has been customary to follow the comment of WJ Watson (1926, 141): 'Dunbar is 'summit fort,' probably taken over from British *din-bar* with the same meaning'. KH Jackson gives a more extended definition: 'Welsh *bar(r)* means 'top, summit. It is *not* [his emphasis] used of promontories but does occur for hill-tops or hills' (*in litt* to LA 15.5.78).

Dunbar has interesting parallels as well as important divergences from the development of Dumbarton. Unlike the sharply defined twin peaks of Clyde Rock, at the confluence of the Leven and the Clyde, the configuration of Anglian Dunbar is a matter of some discussion and even conjecture. South of the mouth of the Firth of Forth, the east coast of Scotland runs in a roughly NW-SE direction, with numerous indentations, large and small. Much of the coast is rocky, with cliffs in the Dunbar area up to about 18m (60ft) in height. At Dunbar itself, there is an obtuse-angled promontory, known today as Castle Park (Perry 2000). Running north from this are rugged rock spines and skerries, of varied width and height, which finally drop to reefs fittingly called The Gripes and Meikle Spiker (illus 67).

Two rock bosses, at virtually the same altitude as the main coastal plateau, bear military works (illus 68; 69). The more southerly one, roughly 25m (80ft) square, carries a 16th-century artillery fort (MacIvor 1981). Slightly to the NE of this is a larger boss on which stands the ruin of a High Medieval castle. This is joined to the mainland cliff by a natural causeway, about 60m (200ft) long, above normal high-tide level. The north end of the castle rock was truncated when the modern harbour was made in 1843-44, but plans by John Mason in 1837 and Joseph Mitchell in 1842 make it possible to estimate the original area as about 55 x 40m (180 x 130ft) overall. This may be compared with the citadels of Early Medieval Dunadd (35 x 20m (115 x 65ft)), Dundurn (35 x 25m (115 x 80ft)), and Urquhart (50 x 20m (165 x 65ft)). It has generally been assumed that this was the citadel of Stephen's *Dynbaer* (Alcock 1981b, 174-5; 1988b, 15-8), but it has not been



68  
Turner's painting  
of Dunbar from  
the harbour, with  
castle ruins to  
right, and block-  
house in left  
background.



possible to test this interpretation by excavation.

Extensive rescue excavations were, however, carried out in Castle Park between 1988 and 1991, over an irregularly-shaped area roughly 50m x 50m (165m x 165ft) at its greatest extent (Perry 2000). An unfortunate limitation was that the northern edge of the excavation had to stop 30m (100ft) short of the main cliff edge, and correspondingly 100m (330ft) short of the castle boss. The major significance of the research was that, despite much disturbance of the ground, a rich and complicated archaeological sequence was revealed. This comprised three broad periods: Prehistoric and Roman Iron Age; Northumbrian/Anglian; and Medieval (that is, post- AD 1050).

Our main concern is with the Anglian period itself, which may have begun as early as the mid-6th century, around

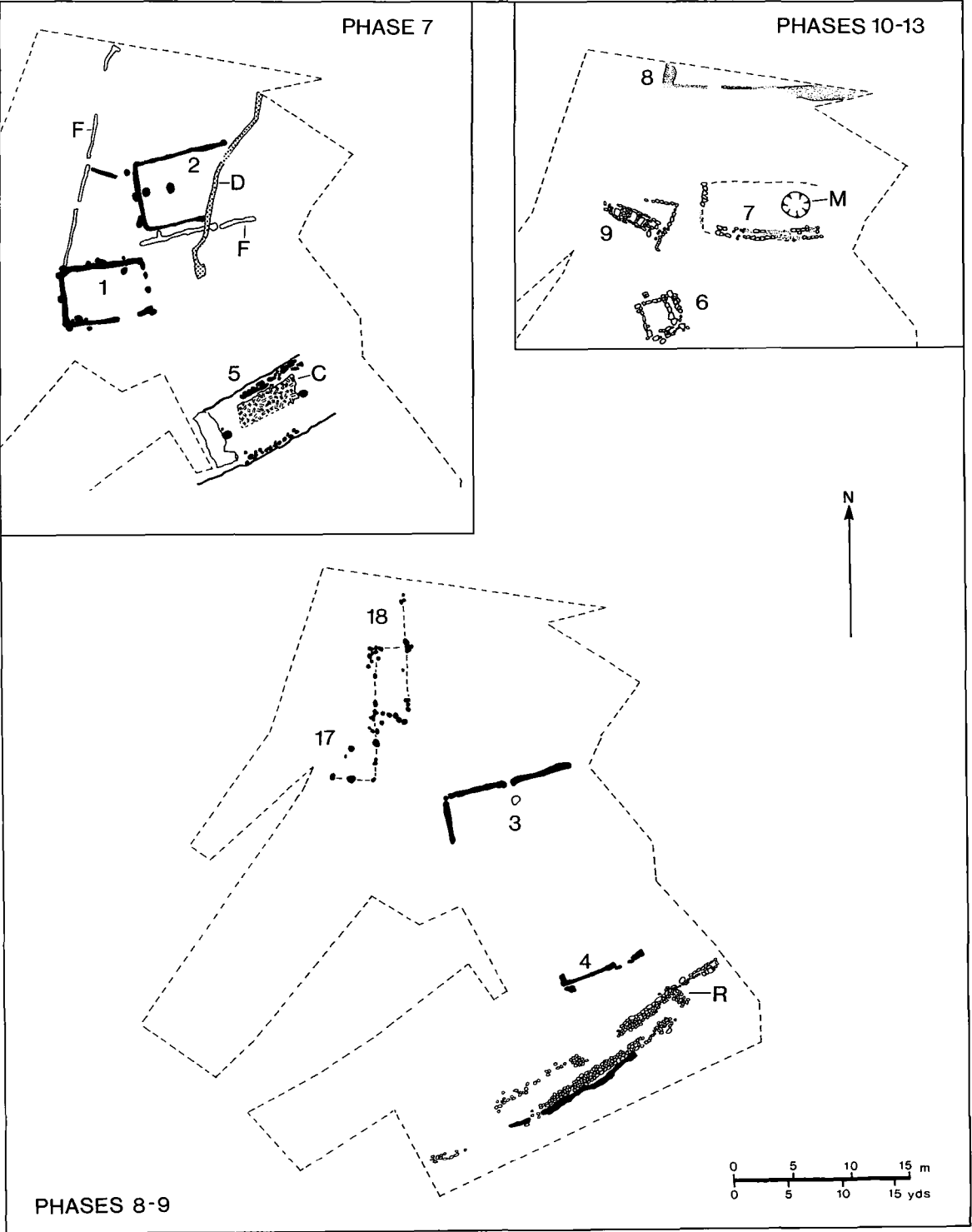
69 Dunbar: remains of medieval and later fortifications from the air, looking from the blockhouse across the castle to the 19th-century harbour (Crown copyright RCAHMS).

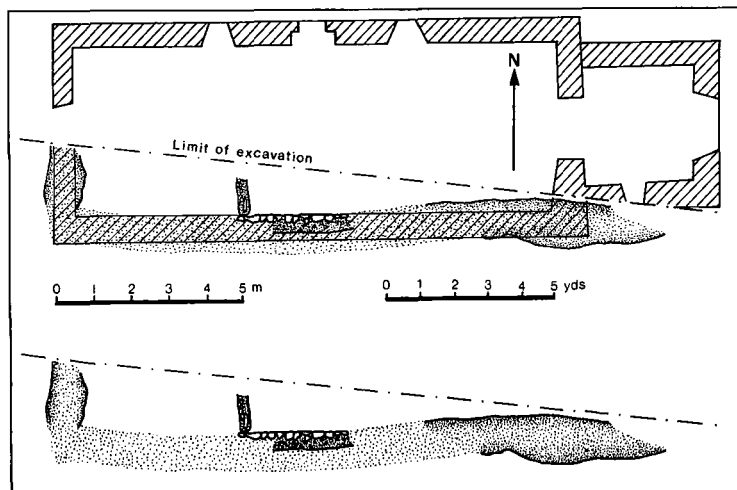
70 (opposite) Dunbar: phase plans of Northumbrian/Anglian period as excavated in 1988-1991 (Angie Townsend). The numbers are those of buildings mentioned in the text  
Key: C = clay floor; D = drain; F = fence; M = mortar mixer; R = rampart.

the traditional date of Ida's occupation of Bamburgh (*HE* v, 24). Presumably the headland had been the site of a *din*, fort, of the Britons for centuries before the Anglian takeover of the territory of the Gododdin. The royal town in which Wilfrid was imprisoned in AD 680 had no doubt been long established.

Significant artefacts of the 7th century include a fragment of a gold-and-garnet pectoral cross, and a gilt-bronze buckle-plate. A mortar-mixer (of phases 10-13) can hardly be earlier than Benedict Biscop's introduction of Gaulish masons to build Monkwearmouth in AD 674, and may have been much later. Coins take us into the 8th and 9th centuries, with a Danish *sceat* of c 710-40 and two Northumbrian *styca*s of c 837-55, one of them in an 'almost new' condition (Pirie 2000). A possible terminal date is provided by an entry in a Scottish Chronicle which relates that Kenneth, son of Alpín, burned Dunbar (*concremavit Dunbarre*) (Anderson 1980, 237; 250). This is a less certain record than that for the Viking plundering of *Alt Clut* in AD 870, and Dunbar lacks evidence of the general conflagration of the Clyde site. Nevertheless there appear to have been scattered remains of burned timbers across the excavated area at Dunbar.

In the excavators' analysis of structures and stratification, the Anglian period is divided into three main phases, with sub-phases 7; 8-9; & 10-13 (illus 70), but it is suggested that 10-13 may merely be sub-phases of the final Anglian phase. It is possible to divide the eleven buildings on the site summarily into an early period (phases 7-9) of buildings of post- (or plank-), set in trench (buildings 1, 2, 3 & 4), or individual posthole construction (buildings 17, 18); and a later period of timber buildings raised on stone footings (buildings 6, 7 & 9) plus one of mortared masonry (building 8). In size, the buildings of the wooden phases ranged from 6.6m x 4.2m (21.6ft x 13.7ft) to 13.5m x 5.8m (44.29ft x 19ft), while those of the stone-footing phases were from 10.0m x 3.6m





(32.7ft x 11.8ft) to 2.4m x 2.0m (7.8ft x 6.5ft).

There was also great variety in the supposed functions of the buildings: an internally-partitioned dwelling and byre (building 1); several stores, one with an open gable (2); a small shed (6); probable smithies, with hearths with slag or remains of lead and copper alloy (3, 4 & 9); a sunken-floored weaving-shed, in which it seems that clay loom-weights were also being made (building 5). Between and among the buildings, fences were set up and removed, court-

71  
Dunbar: possible  
Anglian church  
[this author's  
interpretation].  
Plan of fragments  
of mortared wall  
and wall-trench at  
edge of Dunbar  
excavation (after  
Angie Townsend)  
with, above, plan  
of Escomb Anglo-  
Saxon church  
(hatching) super-  
imposed on top.

yards were laid and altered, stone-lined pits and water-channels served craft and industrial purposes. Moreover, in the mid-Anglian phases (8-9), the south-eastern flank was protected by dry-stone rampart and palisade in an arc which presumably ran from the cliffs on the west to those on the north. In the final Anglian phase, a ditch 1.7m (5½ ft) deep and up to 3.8m (12½ ft) wide was dug outside, and partly impinging on the dry-stone rampart.

What may be the most significant structure of the Anglian period, Building 8, remains somewhat problematic, because of the enforced restriction on the northern extent of the excavations. At the limit of exploration an L-shaped foundation- or robber-trench was discovered, running on an E-W line for 15m (49ft), with a northern return at the west end, running for 2m (6.5ft) (illus 71). Within the trench was a fragment of faced masonry and core, 3m (9.8ft) long, which served to demonstrate that this was a fragment of a structure of mortared masonry, presumably built with mortar from the contemporary mixer.

This is the extent of observation: but it is sufficient to demonstrate the existence of a rectangular stone building with an E-W orientation. The rest, however, is conjecture. In the judgement of this author, it is overwhelmingly probable that such a building, at such a period, is a church. It is indeed possible to overlay the well-established plan of Escomb church (see below 17.2.1) on that of Dunbar building 8, to give an exact fit. The alternative interpretation, that it is a lordly hall appropriate to an *urbs regis*, ignores the facts that we know only one secular stone building at this period, that at Northampton, and that is much more massive than the Dunbar building (Williams *et al* 1985).

The overall impression is that this was not a collection of peasant houses like that at Thirlings (16.2 with illus 91 and 92 below: ref. O'Brien & Miket 1991). Rather, it was a community at once mixed and vibrant, with residential, farming, industrial and ecclesiastical functions. Moreover, in the middle and late Anglian phases, it was defended on the landward side, first by timber and stonework, and subsequently by a large ditch (and presumably an upcast bank?). On the west, its defence was the sea-cliffs, while on the north was the rugged rock-spine crowned with the fort implied by the name *Dynbaer*. The enclosed settlement revealed by the excavations in Castle Park, should be regarded

as a suburb of the fort.

Whatever the truth of the Scottish Chronicle's report of Kenneth's burning of Dunbar, the Anglian phases 10–13 are followed by a hiatus. The next numismatic evidence is a cut halfpenny of David I, dated 1124–53. By that date there was an Earl of Dunbar, and feudal tenure was being established (Barrow 1973, 46). Whether the masonry castle of Dunbar was first erected at that time is a matter of conjecture, and will remain so in default of archaeological excavations on its remains. This author's view is that, although the rock-spine does not dominate the adjacent mainland by its altitude, there are two reasons why it is likely to have been defended in the Anglian period; firstly, to establish in physical terms the social gap between the king and his officials on the one hand, and the peasants and craftworkers of the mainland suburb on the other; and secondly as a necessary defence against marauders from the sea.

### 14.2.3 Whithorn: development from an early Christian centre

Two other towns had their beginnings not as secular seats of power, but as ecclesiastical centres: Whithorn and St Andrews. The earliest written notice of Whithorn is in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, when Bede refers to a Bishop Ninian, who had received instruction in the faith at Rome, and who founded a stone church at Whithorn (*HE* iii, 4). It will be argued below (17.4) that this is more probably an example of architectural iconography in the Roman interest than a reliable historical statement. Totally reliable, however, is Bede's contemporary reference, in summing up the state of Christianity at the time when he was writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: the number of believers had so increased at Whithorn that it had become an episcopal see (*HE* v, 23).

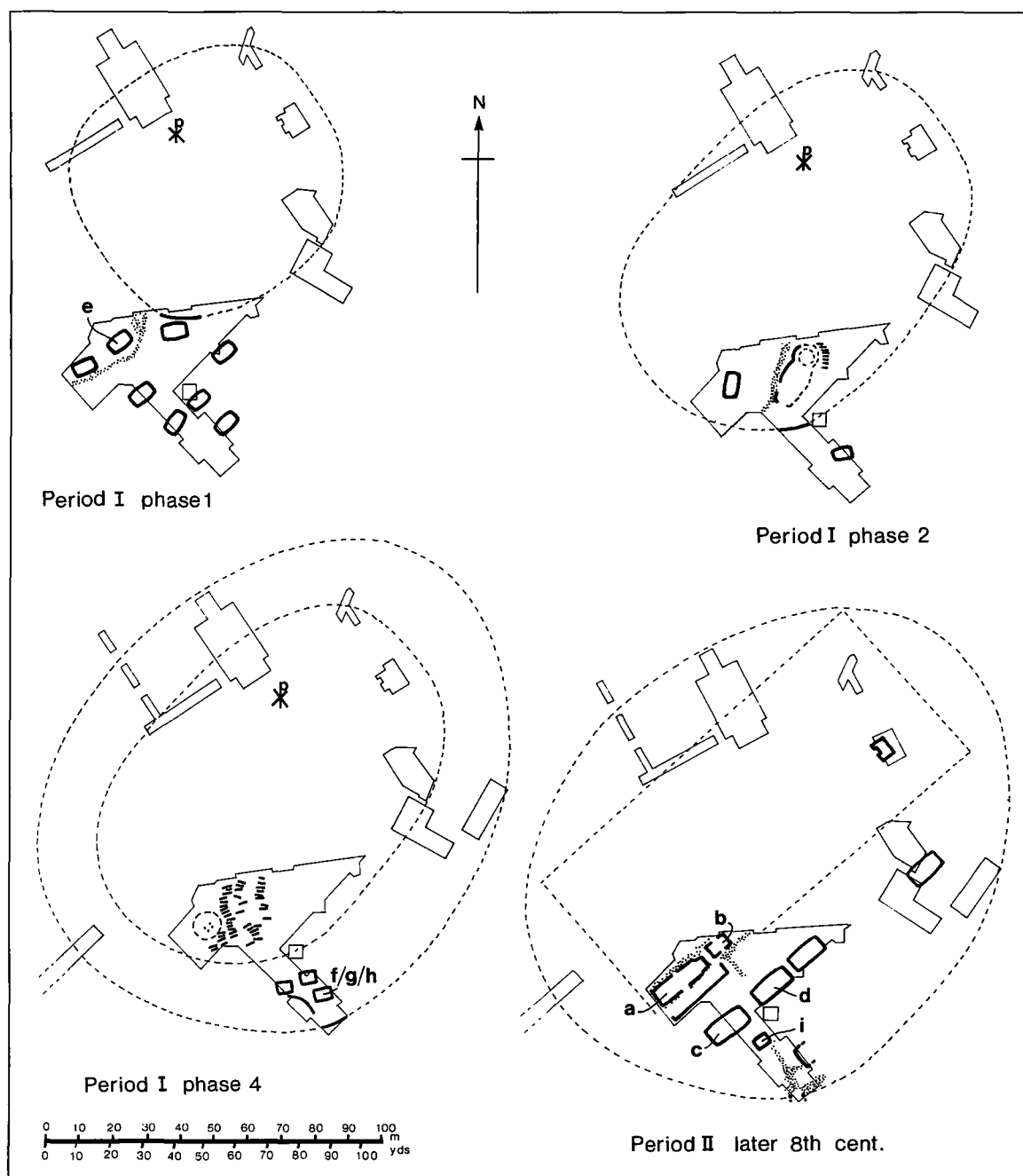
It must be admitted that the previous paragraph has ignored much Early Medieval writing about Ninian, and an even larger body of recent scholarly literature (eg MacQueen 1990, with review by Broun 1991). Such a minimalist view—in addition to reflecting in general terms recent critical approaches to Early Medieval history and quasi-history—may be justified in the present case by two specific arguments. Firstly, in relation to written sources, it adheres to the principle of giving overriding weight to the contemporary witness. Secondly, and by extension, it emphasises the great value of epigraphy as a form of such witness.

In the case of Whithorn, the evidence is as follows. In the later 5th century, a Christian community in Whithorn set up a stone inscribed with an undoubted Christian icon and a Latin text in 11 lines. The icon, technically classed as a 'Constantinian *Chi Rho*' (after Constantine the first Christian emperor), is now almost illegible, but it has been read as a monogram of the first two letters (in the Greek alphabet) of the name of Christ (for further examples of the icon and its significance, see below 21.3.1). The text begins with the words *TE DOMINVM LAVDAMVS*, 'We praise thee, Lord', presumably a phrase from a Christian service, and continues with the statement that one, Latinus, and his daughter made a *sinus*, an asylum, place of protection or concealment, perhaps meaning a church (illus 150a; Thomas 1992, 6).

This, then is evidence for the existence of a Christian community, in the late 5th century, probably—on the evidence of scatters of Romano-British pottery—within an established settlement (designated Period I Phase 0, see below). The reputed find-spot of the inscription suggests that it was originally set up on the crown of a low, domed hill, with the settlement on the lower slopes to the south-east (illus 72): a layout which is mirrored

in the present relations of church and cemetery to the main street and market place of Whithorn (which initiates Period I Phase 1).

The original church is buried, if not wholly obliterated under medieval and later ecclesiastical buildings and burials. If we dismiss Bede's claim that it was built of stone rather than of wood in the British manner, we still have to reckon with the Anglian place-name



of Whithorn <*Hwitærn*, which Bede translated as *Candida Casa*. This suggests a wooden building, coated externally—and perhaps internally as well—with a white lime plaster. Fragments of such plaster coating has been claimed at Dunbar and at Yeavinger. More to the point, the Whithorn excavation has yielded firm evidence for lime plaster (Hill 1997, 81).

### A review of the archaeological evidence

From the 1880s on, a number of small-scale archaeological investigations have been carried out, principally around the Priory Church. Our major source of knowledge of the post-Roman development of Whithorn as both an ecclesiastical and a secular centre comes now from the very large-scale excavations from 1984 to 1991, with subsequent minor continuations (Hill 1997). The excavation was one of considerable technical difficulty, especially because of the large numbers of superimposed graves and timber buildings, intercutting and partially destroying earlier ones. The analysis of structures and finds has made it possible to construct a chronological framework of six major periods between the late 5th century and the present day. Of these, Period I and part of Period II fall within the limits of the present survey, and can be sub-divided into seven phases on the basis of major changes in the layout of Whithorn. From these phases, four site-plans are presented here to illustrate the main developments (illus 72). Two points should be stressed at once. Firstly, the account given here compresses about 130 text pages of the original report into a mere 17 paragraphs; and secondly, the copious evidence for human burials is deliberately excluded.

Period I Phase 1 shows the probable original site of the *Chi Rho* inscription, enclosed by a sub-circular bank and ditch. In an ecclesiastical setting, such enclosures are usually designated by the Latin term *vallum*. They are common to monastic sites in both Britain and Ireland, and some northern British examples are illustrated below (17.1). Outside the *vallum* was an area of secular occupation. In the area of excavation a cluster of eight subrectangular timber buildings was uncovered, suggesting that settlement was already fairly dense. This phase probably began before the middle of the 6th century.

In Phase 2, the main axis of the *vallum* was increased by about 50%, creating a large oval ecclesiastical precinct with an orientation which broadly coincides with that of later stone churches. Presumably they had followed the orientation of the earliest timber church. In the expanded zone a new religious focus was established, in the form of a curvilinear enclosure or shrine, with an adjacent cemetery. In the area of the excavation, the expansion of the inner precinct was achieved at the expense of the secular settlement, and only one house was uncovered in the outer zone. The religious focus continued through phases 3 and 4, with some changes in the structure of the shrine, and a gradual increase in the size of the adjacent cemetery. The most significant development in Phase 4, however, was marked by the erection of an outer *vallum* concentric with that of Phases 2 and 3 (illus 72, Period I phase 4). Comparable plans with an inner religious zone and one, or even two, outer zones given over to crafts, industry and habitation, have long been known in Ireland. The classic site, the monastery of St Mochoi of Nendrum, Co Down, was excavated in 1922 to 1924 (Lawlor 1925; Norman & St Joseph 1969, 97-8). At Nendrum the layout is readily visible, because there was no post-monastic development of the site; but on other Irish sites, secular development flourished around the religious core, and the concentric enclosures must now be traced in the medieval and later street pattern. An excellent example of this is Armagh (Edwards 1990, 108-11). It should be added, however, that in some phases at Whithorn the boundary

72 (opposite)  
Whithorn: major  
phases as revealed  
in excavations  
1984-91 (after  
Angie Townsend).  
The letters a to h  
refer to building  
plans on  
illustrations  
73 & 75.

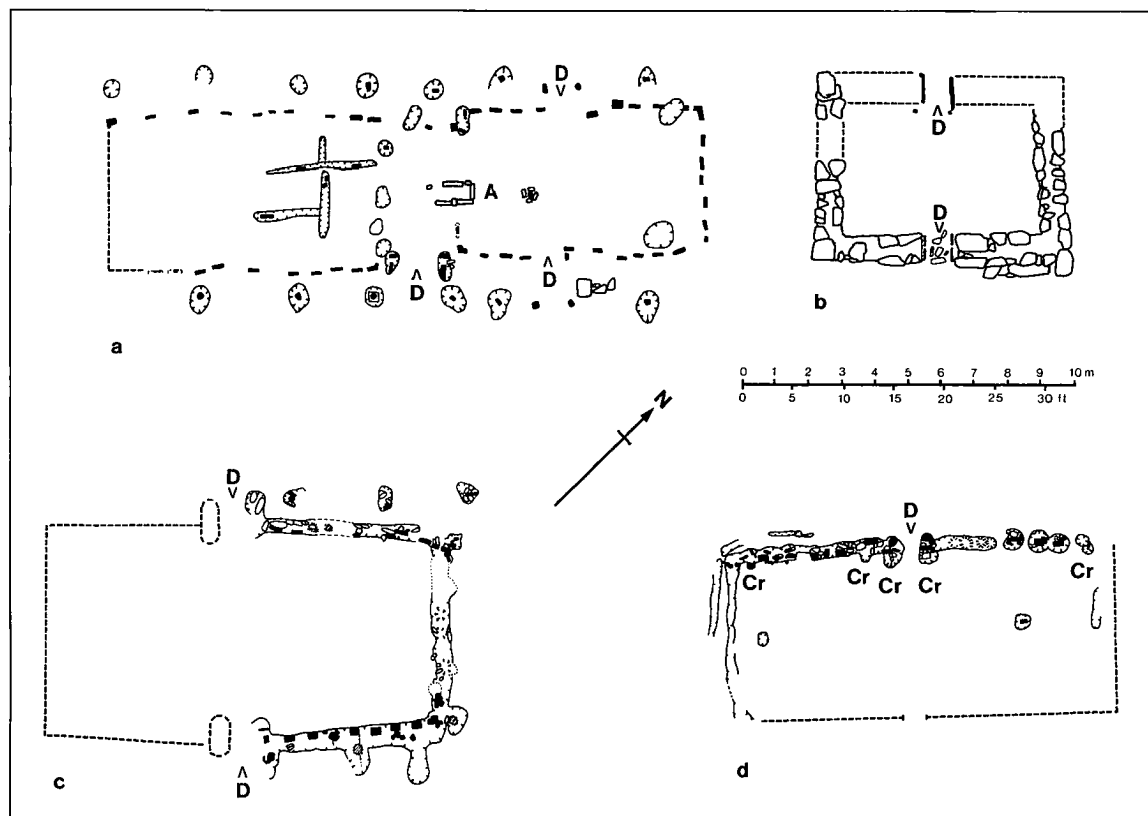
between the inner and outer zones appears to have been notional or conceptual rather than physical.

At Whithorn in Phase 4 the inner zone retained—and even expanded—its essentially religious function. Within the now enclosed outer zone, secular occupation appears to have recovered to the level of Phase 1, to judge from the cluster of buildings revealed by excavation. This phase probably continued into the early decades of the 8th century, with increasing influence from Northumbria. This culminated in the creation of an episcopal see and the installation of Bishop Pethelm or Pecthelm at Whithorn, as Bede relates in the *Ecclesiastical History* (*HE* v, 23), thus providing a terminal date of AD 731 for the event.

Period II, then, marks the major Northumbrian age at Whithorn, from *c* AD 730 to 845 (illus 72; 73). It appears that considerable changes were initiated on the upper southern slopes of the hill, though the evidence for some of these is distinctly speculative. It is at this stage that the general site plan indicates a 'Putative principal church' on the crown of the hill. The oval boundary of the inner zone disappears, but is replaced by a large rectangular enclosure, initially in three compartments. This arrangement appears to be inferred from a short length of walling running on a SW-NE alignment between two ranges of major buildings.

73  
Major buildings in  
Whithorn Period  
II: a) church;  
b) burial chapel;  
c & d) halls (after  
Angie Townsend).

The upper of these ranges replaced the earlier shrine and cemetery complex, with two small rectangular oratories and a burial enclosure. Perhaps around AD 800 these were



replaced by a wooden church with a significantly narrowed east end—presumably a chancel—and a burial chapel (illus 73; 74). Immediately below the upper range, in both its phases, was an open space; and below that again was an extensive row of small timber halls, which exhibit an interesting variety of architectural techniques. It is very reasonably suggested that a major function of these halls was to provide accommodation for guests of the monastery. From the open space between the upper and lower range a large quantity of 8th- and 9th-century Northumbrian coins was recovered.

In the mid-9th century, however, these buildings were dismantled, left to decay or—in the case of the church—used as a granary. But this takes us beyond the chronological limits of the present survey. From the outline of Whithorn's developing layout, attention must now be directed firstly to a more detailed examination of some of the better preserved buildings, and then to the abundant evidence for the secular activities of the people of Whithorn.

### The buildings

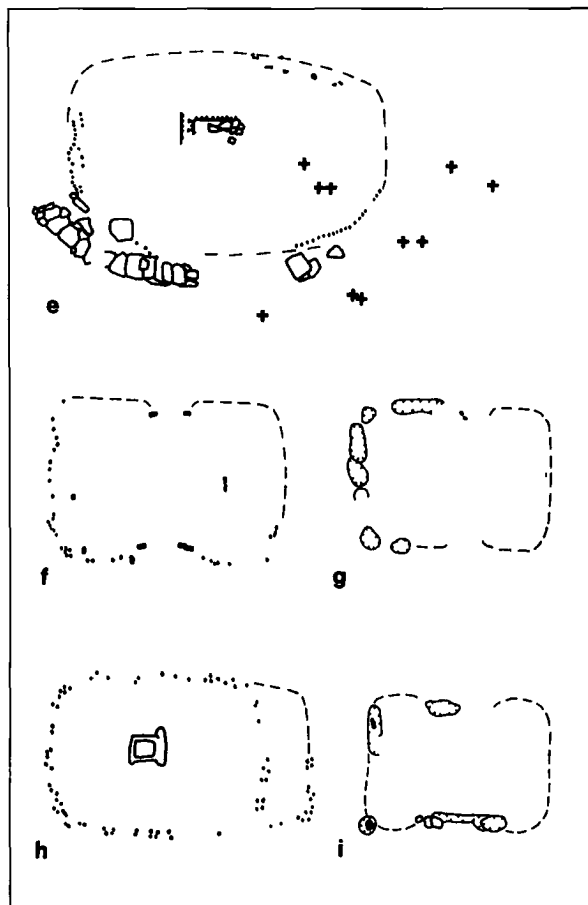
The buildings of the period of our concern fall into three broad classes: domestic, high-status, and ecclesiastical. Remains of 15 or more buildings classifiable as domestic were uncovered; but despite the 10m width of the main excavation trench, very few complete house-plans were uncovered. Moreover, the frequent demolition of already flimsy buildings, and their replacement by rather similar structures on more or less the same stance, complicates and confuses attempts to disentangle individual plans. In some cases the only evidence is a slight levelling off into the hill slope, forming a subrectangular area which can be interpreted as a building stance.

It is indeed possible to expand actual fragmentary plans into complete, but hypothetical, ones on the assumption of symmetry on both long and short axes. Examples of these can be seen in the final excavation report (Hill 1997, espec p 138, illus 4.3). The present account, by contrast, concentrates on the evidence of a small number of fairly complete plans, presented here in a slightly simplified style (illus 75; the location of the selected buildings is indicated on illus 72).

The earliest building illustrated here is I.6 of Period I phase 1. This was a sub-rectangular stake structure, about 8.0 x 4.6m (26 x 15ft), with a central hearth. There may have been some dry-stone reinforcement of the wicker walls, and an 'apron' of stone slabs outside the lower wall, perhaps to compensate for the slope of the ground. There



74  
Whithorn:  
suggested recon-  
structions of the  
church (a) and  
halls 6a (c) and 9a  
(d) (after Angie  
Townsend).



75  
Whithorn:  
domestic build-  
ings, e to i from  
illustration 72  
(after Angie  
Townsend).

Turning finally to Period II, the only complete plan of a domestic building appears to be that of Building II.14, datable around AD 800. Of this the excavator remarks 'the most coherent feature was a doorway in the south wall' (Hill 1977, 180). This had a horizontal slot for a timber threshold, and two squared pits for hanging the door. Otherwise there was a curious combination of post-slots and -holes, apparently including uprights for a southern verandah, and flimsy wicker walls. The overall dimensions are distinctly small: 4.5 x 3.5m (14ft 9in x 11ft 6in).

The buildings which may be classified above as 'high-status' form a row running SW-NE below the 'Inner precinct' or ecclesiastical zone (illus 72, buildings c & d). They have been described as 'halls', but this is in reference not to their size, but to their open floor-plan. Within the main trench, excavation revealed a row of three halls, several times rebuilt. Another one, on the same alignment, was discovered further to the east.

In broad terms, the normal plan was a double square, with opposed entrances in the long sides. Where it could be measured, the width was 6m (19ft 6in) at the maximum, with an overall length of a little over 12m (39ft). The normal construction was of spaced squared timbers, presumably infilled with wattle. Points of particular constructional interest, well demonstrated in the plans and reconstructions (illus 74), are the sloping external props of Hall 6a, and the suggested cruck roof of Hall 9a.

was no evidence for doors, though the gap in the south wall does suggest a doorway. A scatter of Class Bi amphora sherds was probably derived from an earlier phase.

A sequence of superimposed structures in Period I Phase 4 illustrates very well both the general character of the buildings and the difficulties of excavation and interpretation: Buildings I.18 (earliest); I.21; and I.24. Building I.18 was quite large: 7.0 x 4.0m (23 x 13ft) including an end chamber only 1.2m (4ft) wide. The large room had a central hearth, with perhaps a clay-daubed wicker chimney. Where evidence of the walls was best preserved, it indicated a double row of stake-holes, but there is nothing to show whether this was infilled with turf or clay. There is no clear evidence for doors.

Overlying I.18 was the NW quarter of Building I.21, indicated by an interrupted 'L'-shaped trench which had held upright timber posts. On the principle of double-axial symmetry mentioned above, this would suggest an original subrectangular structure with opposed doors in a double-square plan, measuring about 6.0 x 3.0m (19ft 7in x 9ft 10in). This in turn was overlaid by Building I.24, a flimsy-seeming construction of a single row of stakes, measuring 6.0 x 4.0m (19ft 7in x 13ft). Its clearest feature was the opposed doors, framed by substantial posts.

As the overall plan of Period II Phases 3/4 shows, there was an open space above the range of halls. Above that again began the inner precinct or ecclesiastical zone. In the early phases of Period II the archaeological evidence was of two small timber oratories, but in Phase 3 these were remodelled to form a church measuring 17.9 x 4.5m (58ft 9in x 14ft 9in). A so-called 'burial chapel' in line to the east of the oratories was retained in Phases 3/4 (illus 72 a & b)

The church itself was divided into a nave and chancel in the proportions three-fifths/two-fifths, with a setting probably for an altar at the divide. There were opposing doors in the chancel and at least one door in the south wall of the nave. Because of later disturbance, it cannot be said whether or not there had been a western door. Other arrangements within the church are best represented in the plan. The external walls appear to have been constructed either of alternating deeper- and shallower-bedded planks, or spaced planks with wattle infilling. At roughly 1m (39in) from the long walls, a row of posts supported a verandah (reconstruction: illus 74a).

The 'burial chapel' was a quite remarkable building: a slightly irregular oblong structure of clay was raised on a stone plinth, with maximum internal dimensions of 6m x 4m (19ft 8in x 13ft). There were two opposed doorways. The use of clay-walling was foreign, and it is suggested that it was introduced specifically for the temporary storage of high-status human bodies. The case for this is argued from the basis that a properly-maintained clay wall gives good temperature and humidity control. Another exotic feature, this time probably from Northumbria itself, was that of coloured window-glass. It is further suggested that, with its opposed doors, the chapel served as a gateway between the outside world and the hallowed ground of the ecclesiastical precinct (Hill 1997, espec 165 & 170).

### The artefacts

When we turn from buildings to portable artefacts, it is no surprise, given the scale of the excavations, to learn that they occurred not only in large numbers but also represented a wide range of activities as well. Starting with the basic occupations of farming and the processing of food, an initial surprise was the recovery of numbers of plough pebbles: that is, natural pebbles which had been set in the wooden sole of ploughs in order to reduce wear, and to make it possible to cultivate relatively heavy soils. The consequent wear on the pebbles themselves is a sure indicator of their use. Two points are specially worthy of comment: hitherto, the technique had been regarded as a much later invention, but at Whithorn it was firmly placed in the late 5th to mid-9th centuries; and secondly, it seems possible to associate its introduction with the Early Christian (and presumably monastic) settlement (Hill 1997, 27-29).

Perhaps as a reflection of increased cereal production, two large millstones were recovered (Hill 1997, 29 & 35), in addition to several hand-operated querns. The millstones might recall the evidence of the early Saxon mill on the river Tyne at Corbridge (above 8.2.4); but it is difficult to see where a natural flow of water, comparable with that at Corbridge, could have been found in the vicinity of Whithorn. It seems possible therefore that the very minor Ket Brook, to the north of the Whithorn hill, had been dammed to produce a suitable head of water (Hill 1997, 35 & 460).

In animal husbandry, cattle were dominant, consistent with the record of other sites of the period (8.3.3). The scarcity of sheep or goats is notable, and may be linked to the

rarity of textiles and the equipment for producing them: again this is normal for the period. The appearance of deer for venison in Period II is paralleled at Iona, as is that of goose. At Whithorn the occurrence of both fowl and goose is attributed to the resources of a monastic estate.

Agricultural production, as well no doubt as ecclesiastical donations and fees, helped to pay for a variety of crafts and imports such as those discussed elsewhere (above, 8.1 imports, 8.2 common crafts; below, 19 fine metalwork)). The large number of potsherds of ultimately Mediterranean or Continental origin, together with refinements in the chronology of the production centres, makes it possible to suggest that phases of importation were rather sporadic: class B amphorae in the late 5th to mid-6th century; red-slipped tableware in the mid-6th; grey-slipped D-ware bowls from Gaul rather vaguely in the 6th; and the heavily gritted E-ware table ware, also from Gaul in the early 7th, but perhaps beginning in the late 6th and continuing into the 8th century.

Particular interest attaches to the large collection of glass from Whithorn. Ewan Campbell's discussion (1997b) deals with a total of 431 sherds, representing a minimum of about 80 vessels, the largest collection known at present from an Early Historic context in northern or western Britain. The largest class, Campbell's Groups C and D, respectively decorated and undecorated, is indeed the most common glass found on western sites. The forms are mostly thin-walled cone-shaped beakers in pale fabrics. Those in Group C are decorated with white trails, horizontal, vertical, or with festoons or chevrons. The place of manufacture is unknown, but the association on Insular sites with pottery of classes D and E suggests a provenance in western or north-western France. A smaller collection of cone-beakers is distinguished by thick walls and rims.

The relatively small Group B is of types found in Anglo-Saxon contexts, but also on the major south-western sites of Dinas Powys and Cadbury Congresbury. Group A, the smallest group, is distinguished by wheel-cut decoration, which may be of ultimately Roman or Mediterranean origin; it is altogether rare in Britain. Even more rare as a class is Whithorn Group E. The conical vessel-form is itself very common, but the group is distinguished by its thicker walls, its decorative schemes, and especially by its rims, which are fire-rounded but not thickened. Since these characteristics are at present unique to the site, it is possible (but unprovable) that Group E was manufactured, probably in the later 6th century AD, at Whithorn itself. This should not come as a total surprise, given the discovery at Dunollie of a sherd from a vessel which had apparently been made locally (Sanderson 1987).

In the Northumbrian period, the most surprising group of finds was that of 62 silver or base silver Northumbrian coins (*sceattas* and *stycas*: 8. 1.4 above) minted before the mid-9th century. The bulk of these were found below the terrace-wall fronting the church. Indeed the distribution appeared to focus on the south door of the nave, as though the coins had been cast down by worshippers leaving the church. This would suggest that their significance was religious rather than commercial. Indeed, given the wider picture of the use of coins in Greater Bernicia at the time, it is difficult to understand their economic function. Northwards from the Tyne, there are some 15 find-spots with comparable coins (Pirie 1986; Cormack 1995, 48-9); and many of these are singletons. Against this overall pattern, the Whithorn collection presents us with a problem rather than a solution.



This has been a necessarily very condensed account of the early centuries of Whithorn as an urban site. It has provided insights into the town's developing layout, with elements of both continuity and change in various areas. A range of buildings, ecclesiastical and secular, of both humble and more prestigious status, has been revealed. There have been tantalizing hints of a money economy, and more substantial evidence of the basic agricultural economy. Although, inevitably, the excavation could not penetrate to the modern ecclesiastical core of Whithorn, the major influence of the church was widely apparent. But in the absence of written records of the kind available from medieval burghs, at Whithorn we have no knowledge of the relationship between secular and clerical institutions, or of civic organization.

The developing layout of Whithorn, and its varied activities, both religious and secular, mark it as a town of exceptional intrinsic significance. Extrinsically, its obvious importance lies in the comparison with the double-enclosures of Irish towns such as Armagh. By the same token, in northern Britain it provides an important clue—though one little regarded hitherto—to the development of St Andrews as a centre both ecclesiastical and secular; and to that we now turn.

#### 14.2.4 St Andrews: early Christian monastery and burgh (illus 76)

The Early Christian monastery and medieval burgh of St Andrews were situated on a blunt promontory with sea cliffs rising between 16–19m (50–60ft) OD. On the north, a minor rock spur became the site for a medieval castle, which may have been preceded by a prehistoric or Early Historic promontory fort. On the east, the promontory is terminated by a N-S inlet which forms the harbour. The NE angle of high ground is known as Kirk Hill. From this point, the ground drops steeply to the south; but to the west the high ground runs more or less parallel to the coastal cliffs and forms the broad spine on which settlement developed (illus 77). Further south the ground falls gently to a west-east flowing stream, the Kinness Burn, which runs into the harbour. Further south the ground rises gently to a ridge a little over 76m OD (250ft), which forms the southern skyline for St Andrews.

On the promontory itself, three zones of Early Christian and medieval activity can be noted (illus 78). The north-east is dedicated to ecclesiastical purposes, with a cathedral, priory, other churches (all now in ruins), and also cemeteries. This religious zone forms an irregular oblong, bounded by the line of the latter-day street, The Pends, and roughly 275 x 135m (300 x 150yds). There is then an intermediate zone about 135m (150yds) wide, which broadly parallels the western and southern bounds of the ecclesiastical zone; it is bounded on the west and the south by the line of Castle Street and Abbey Walk. West of this again is a regular layout of buildings, largely domestic, along three main E-W streets, and with a central market place: successor to the first medieval burgh of St Andrews. The eastern and intermediate zones recall the double-concentric layouts of Whithorn and Armagh, but before this idea is explored further the early historical notices of St Andrews must be examined.

The first written notice of events at St Andrews is in the Ulster Annal for AD 747: *Mors Tuathalain ab[batis] Cinrigh Monai*, Death of Tuathalain, abbot of Cenrigmonaid (MO Anderson 1990, s.a. 747). The place has been identified as Kinrimond, a medieval name for St Andrews, and the annal is regarded as evidence for the existence of a monastery on the site by 747. The precise meaning of the place-name has been a matter of some

76  
 St Andrews:  
 vertical aerial view  
 of medieval  
 ecclesiastical  
 layout (*Crown*  
*copyright*  
*RCAHMS*).



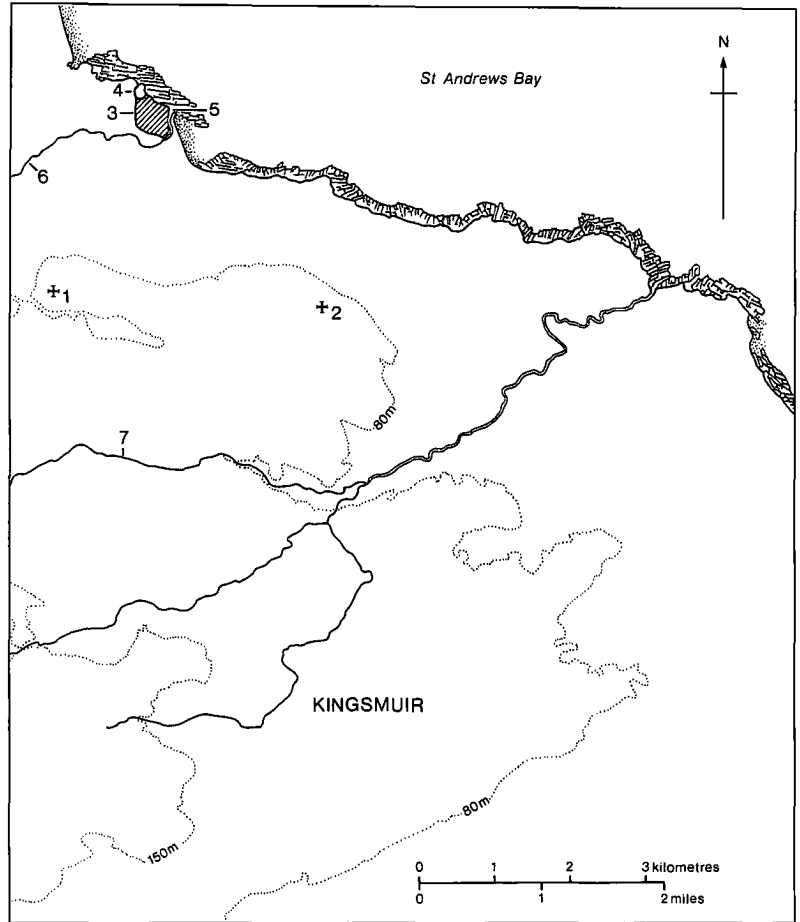
debate: was it a simple topographical reference to the 'head of the king's ridge' (Brooks & Whittington 1977, 285); or did it imply a royal mound (Anderson 1974b, 67), perhaps suggesting a royal inauguration- or assembly-mound akin to that at Scone?

The current interpretation, however, is in terms of the 'end of the king's *muir*' or 'rough grazing' (Taylor 1997, 3). In identifying the king's *muir*, it should be recalled that the southward view from St Andrews is bounded by a long ridge: on this are two farms, Wester and Easter Balrymonth (illus 77). These imply the former existence of an early *baile* or township, with the element *rymont*, 'king's *muir*' as its defining feature. From this it may be possible to infer a royal estate, bounded on the south by the ridge, and on the NE by the sea. It may even be suggested that the implied royal estate extended as far south as the medieval Kingsmuir, some 5.25 miles (8.5km)—a little over an hour's walk—south of St Andrews (S Taylor (ed) 1998, 3).

Traditionally, St Andrews was founded most probably by Oengus I, son of Fergus, who, as we have seen, ravaged Dál Riata and seized the major fort of Dunadd in AD 736 (AU

s.a., AD 735). Reputedly, the founding marked the occasion of the bringing of the relics of St Andrew to Scotland by St Regulus. In the mid-10th century, Constantine II, son of Aed, having during his reign upheld the rights of the Scottish church, retired into religion and became abbot of St Andrews (MO Anderson 1974b, 69). At that time, St Andrews was the major centre of Scottish Christianity.

Probably few of these statements would pass the test of historical verification proposed by Dumville (1993; review by Kirby 1994). Indeed, in 1974 the historian of early St Andrews remarked that 'it is difficult to find anything in the legends that can be treated as history' (MO Anderson 1974a, 7). It is not until the 12th century that we have contemporary official documents, such as royal and episcopal charters, to provide more acceptable historical evidence.



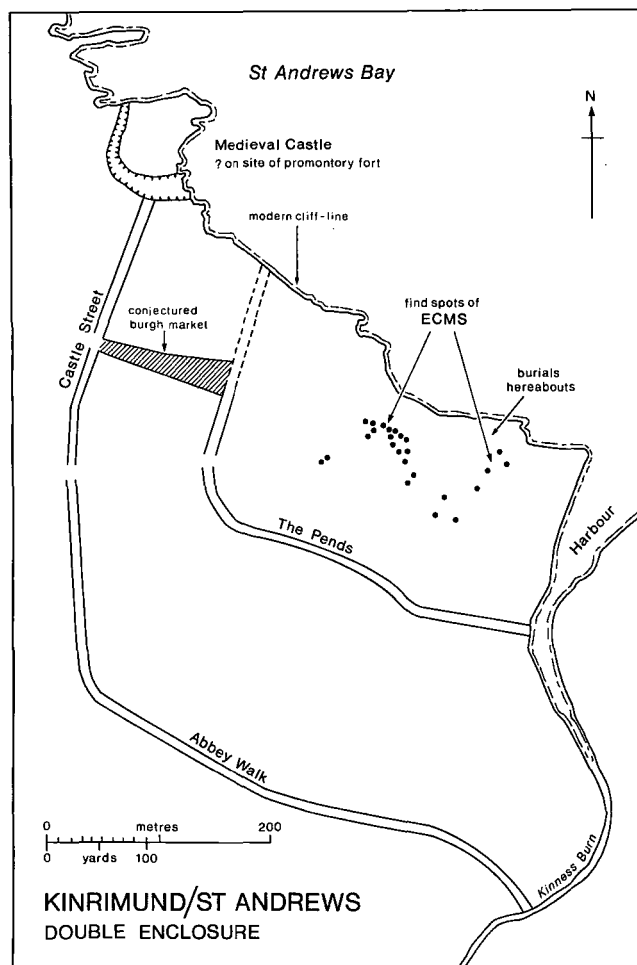
If we turn, then, to the 12th century, we find a charter datable AD 1144 x 1153, in which Bishop Robert proclaimed the foundation of a burgh at St Andrews. This received the recognition of David I that it was an acceptable burgh (Spearman 1988, 106). It was not a royal burgh but an episcopal one. The charter presumably refers to the fan-like street layout in the westerly of the three zones identified above (Brooks & Whittington 1977, 289 with fig 5; illus 76 this volume). Between AD 1153 and 1165, a further five charters were dated in St Andrews by Malcolm IV (McNeill & MacQueen 1996, 159-60).

This, however, leaves us with a hiatus between the notices of the Early Christian period and the mid-12th-century records. This in turn inspires a search for elements of secular settlement before the 1150s. Possible hints are given by the mention of a (pre-burghal) *vill* in Bishop Robert's foundation charter; and the record in the charter of Bishop Roger (1189-98) of the removal of the market cross (presumably to the market place in the centre of the burghal layout) from 'where the *clochin* used to be'. What and where was the *clochin*?

It is accepted that *clochin* in the Latin charter is to be read as Gaelic *clachan*: that is, in Scots, a 'kirk town', a settlement with a church. In the present context, it seems likely to

77

The location and wider environs of St Andrews  
Key: 1) Wester Balrymonth;  
2) Easter Balrymonth;  
3) early St Andrews;  
4) Medieval castle;  
5) harbour;  
6) Kinness burn;  
7) Cameron burn.



78  
Kinrimund/St  
Andrews: plan of  
the conjectured  
double enclosure.  
'Find spots of  
ECMS' indicates  
finds of Early  
Christian sculpture.

here. There is a methodological reason to support this interpretation: namely, that it uses as major indicators of the earliest layout of St Andrews two street lines, now known as The Pends and Abbey Walk, which are broadly parallel one to another, but quite unconnected with the street layout of the planned burgh.

The character of buildings in the secular area of Early Christian St Andrews must remain highly speculative. More can, however, be said about the religious area. The earliest evidence is for a cemetery beside the cliff-top at the NE corner of Kirk Hill. Within the excavated area there were about 330 individual burials, mostly simple extended burials with the head to the west. Three only were in long cists made of stone slabs, but others had small slabs flanking the skull. Radiocarbon dates from seven skeletons are described as 'clustering in the second half of the 1st millennium AD' (Wordsworth & Clark 1997, 11-15).

Relevant to our period, the Kirkhill excavation yielded an enamelled mount of copper alloy, ornamented with a rather crude swastika. For this a date in the 8th-9th centuries has very reasonably been suggested (Bourke 1997, 65-7). A similar date may perhaps be indicated for a lathe-turned hemispherical bronze bowl with lid, found perhaps in

imply a natural, organically-developed grouping of houses, in contrast to a deliberately-founded burgh with its organized street and house layout and its burghal regulations and dues. It would be an appropriate word to use of buildings in the outer concentric zone of Period I Phase 4 at Whithorn (illus 72 above).

Despite the recent publication of archaeological excavations carried out over the decade 1980-89 (Rains & Hall 1997), there is no evidence to guide us to the location or character of the *clochin*. It must be stressed here that the necessary 'key-hole' character of these excavations would have precluded any chance of recognizing and recovering flimsy—and frequently fragmentary—buildings such as were discovered at Whithorn.

It has been suggested that it spanned the three zones, running in an ESE-WNW direction from the NE corner of Kirk Hill into the eastern part of the planned burgh of the mid-12th century (Brooks & Whittington 1977, 291-3). Despite the thoughtful arguments that Brooks and Whittington deployed, it now seems more reasonable in the light of other Celtic examples of dual ecclesiastical-plus-secular layouts (as at Armagh and Whithorn), to see St Andrews as another example, with the pre-burghal secular settlement in the middle zone of the three defined

1898 in the middle of the ecclesiastical area. The bowl was 100mm (4in) in diameter and 37mm (1.5in) in depth. Both internally and externally, the base has an engraved hexafoil or marigold pattern within a double circle, while the lid has a ringed equal-armed cross. It is these designs which suggest the Early Christian dating.

In the 8th and 9th centuries a distinctive school of Early Christian sculpture produced cross-slabs and standing crosses, of which many fragments have been recovered from later buildings, or in the course of grave digging (Fleming 1931). The most important discovery of such sculpture is that of the well-known sarcophagus or slab shrine (illus 79). This is not the place to discuss it in art-historical terms, though it can be said that an 8th-century date is probable (below, 22.2.2; illus 165-6). Here, emphasis must be placed on the significance of the principal side panel as a celebration of kingship both divine and secular, personified in King David. It has been cogently argued that it was a royal tomb, an object of processions, and that it was placed beside the altar of a church (Henderson 1994; and see now full account in Foster (ed) 1998). We can only speculate which particular Scottish king was enshrined in the sarcophagus, though Oengus I is a leading candidate. It is reasonable, however, to believe that a royal tomb would be set up in a chapel-royal; and this is a powerful indicator of the pre-eminent place of St Andrews in the early Scottish Church.



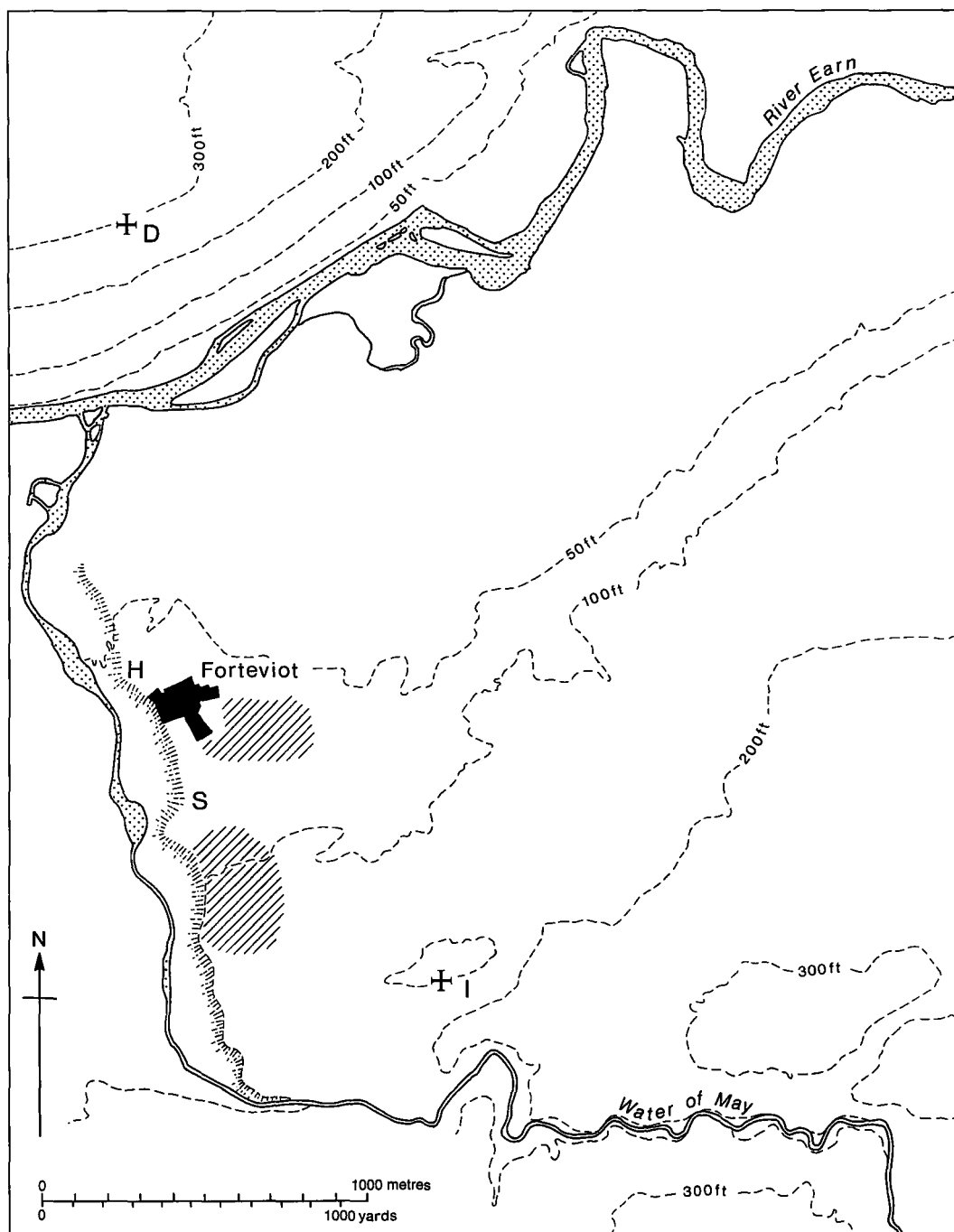
79  
The St Andrews sarcophagus: principal preserved slab, assumed to come from a royal tomb (*Historic Scotland*).

The secular status of St Andrews remains, however, more obscure. If the concept of a secular zone concentric with the ecclesiastical core is accepted, we are still left with unanswered—possibly indeed unanswerable—questions. What was the size and density of the lay population? What were the character, layout and density of buildings? What trades and industries were carried out? Was the natural harbour much used, whether for fishing or trade, in the early centuries as it was in later times (Brooks & Whittington 1977, 280-1)? The example of Whithorn makes it abundantly clear that only large-scale excavations could answer these questions: that they can be asked should be a stimulus to further archaeological research.

### 14.3 A FAILED ROYAL CENTRE: FORTEVIOT

Today Forteviot is an undistinguished village on the south bank of the River Earn about 9 miles (15km) before it flows into the Firth of Tay (illus 80). It stands at about 60m (200ft) OD on a gentle slope of rich arable land, which in recent years has yielded an abundance of cropmarks lying to the east and south of the village. To the south are traces of a large palisaded enclosure, possibly Neolithic in date, and four smaller ditched oval enclosures marking ceremonial henge monuments of the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.

The banks and ditches of the henges were probably still visible until the intensive ploughing of very recent times. Certainly they would have been clear when a number of small square and round enclosure-ditches with central pits were dug close to Forteviot



80 Forteviot and its environs. The relevant features here are: the early 9th-century crosses at Dupplin (D) and Invermay (I); Haly Hill (H), probable site of an early church; S) scarp of former course of the Water of May; hatching marks areas of crop-marks.

village. These are interpreted as high-prestige Pictish burials. This appears to be an example of a widespread phenomenon: the attraction and respect for ancestral monuments for later centuries and even millennia (Bradley 1993, espec 125-6).

Other evidence of Pictish activity is provided by fragments of sculptured slabs, and an arch, probably from the chancel of a Pictish church (illus 81). Across the River Earn a spectacular sculptured monument, the Dupplin cross, looked down on the village (illus 82). There was also a second cross, now vandalized, in a comparable setting to the south of the village.

The Dupplin cross itself bears an inscription, now badly eroded; but the skill of Dr Katherine Forsyth has enabled her to read the personal name CUSTANTIN FILIUS



81  
The Forteviot arch, found in the Water of May, and assumed to be from the chancel arch of the church on Haly Hill.



82  
Dupplin Cross: two faces. Left: the military display side panel with two senior (moustached) footsoldiers and (shadowed) the king on horseback and, below, four foot soldiers. Right: top, eroded inscription; central panel of doves surrounding interlace; bottom, David rescuing a lamb from a lion, and smiting a bear (*Historic Scotland*).

FIRCUS, that is, Constantine, son of Fergus (Forsyth 1995). He assumed the Pictish kingship in AD 789, and subsequently added that of Dál Riata, perhaps in 811. The implication of the inscription is that the cross was either commissioned by Constantine himself, or by his immediate successor. The Annals of Ulster record his death in 819, correctly 820, and it is a reasonable inference that the cross was erected at that time.

Apart from the panel with the inscription, and interlace and scroll ornamentation, five of the carved panels are statements of kingship; obliquely in terms of divine kingship, and quite blatantly in terms of military might. As for the first, there are two scenes featuring David, and foretelling his role as a divinely anointed king: one as a shepherd boy rescuing his father's lamb from a lion, and smiting a marauding bear (I Samuel, 17; illus 82a and 116 below); and the other playing a harp to soothe King Saul (I Samuel, 16; illus 117 below). But three other panels depict warriors: a moustached king on horseback; two other moustached foot-soldiers, leaders of military units; and a rank of four moustache-less—and therefore young—foot soldiers (illus 82b and 44 above). These royal images, of a king and two senior leaders, appear again on the Forteviot chancel arch. It may reasonably be assumed that the destroyed cross south of Forteviot made a similar politico-military statement; its only remaining fragment bears a diagonal key-pattern like decorative panels on the Dupplin cross.

This very positive statement of Pictish and Dál Riata military kingship is hardly matched by the meagre historical notices of Forteviot. The last of the Pictish kings, Drust, son of Ferat, was allegedly slain by the Scots at Forteviot (or less likely Scone), perhaps in AD 839. The Scottish king, Kenneth, son of Alpín, died *in palacio Fothiurtaicht*, 'in the palisaded place (or perhaps palace) of Forteviot'. Kenneth's brother Donald is said to have made the rights and laws of the Scots as king at Forteviot. There is also a reference to Forteviot in the foundation legend of St Andrews, to the effect that the three sons of Oengus met St Regulus at *urbs Fortevieth* when he brought the relics of St Andrew to Pictland. Subsequently, Oengus I, son of Fergus (AD 729-35) founded a church (*basilica*) there.

It has already been remarked, in the account of the founding of St Andrews, that the historicity of any or all of these statements cannot be firmly established (MO Anderson 1974a; 1974b; 1980). This makes the contemporary inscription naming CUSTANTIN FILIUS FIRCUS on the Dupplin cross, and its accompanying powerful iconography of the warrior king, all the more significant.

After the mid-9th-century mentions of Kenneth and Donald, there is a hiatus of three centuries. Contemporary records begin then with royal charters issued at Forteviot by Malcolm IV and William the Lion, dated respectively AD 1162 x 1164 and 1165 x 1171 (Barrow (ed) 1960, no 256; Barrow & Scott (ed) 1971, no 17). Since the witness-list of the charter of Malcolm includes the king's mother and brother, a royal residence may be inferred; but it must be remembered that Forteviot was only one of a score of Malcolm's place-dates, stretching from Aberdeen to Carlisle (Barrow 1996, 160). Later still, Forteviot is recorded as the seat of a royal official known as a thane, who administered a district in lower Strathearn (Driscoll 1991, espec fig 5.4). These medieval references imply a considerable decline in the status of Forteviot from the period of Constantine, son of Fergus, and Kenneth and Donald, sons of Alpín.

This historical summary justifies the title of this sub-chapter. It leaves open, however, the question: why did the strong royal interest in Forteviot in the 9th century fail to

generate a royal burgh in later centuries? Was it the absence of a major ecclesiastical centre as at St Andrews and Whithorn? Or the lack of a harbour as at St Andrews and Dunbar? These questions cannot be answered from the evidence available to us.

(The archaeological account of Forteviot and the Dupplin cross is based on Alcock & Alcock 1992, with heavy revision, and Forsyth 1995).

## NORTHUMBRIAN GREAT ENCLOSURES AND HALLS

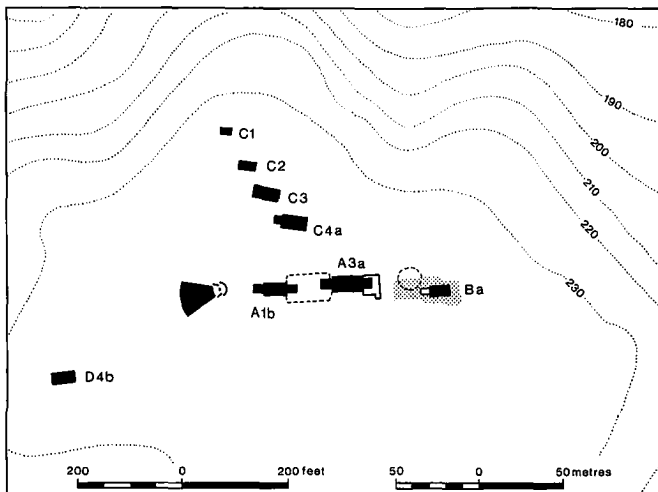
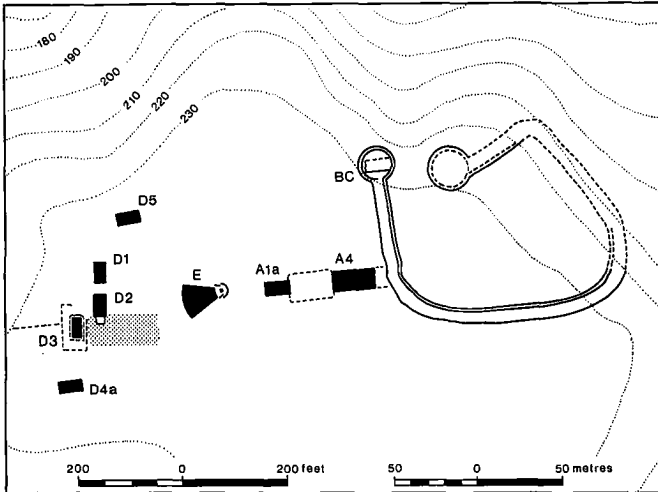
### 15.1 GREAT ENCLOSURES

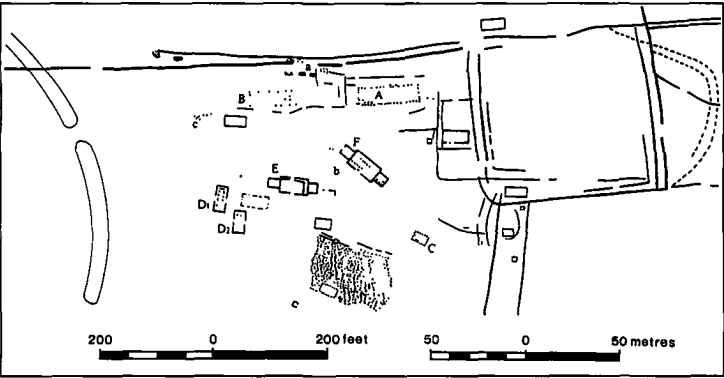
#### 15.1.1 Introduction

A small but highly distinctive group of enclosed sites—at Milfield and Yeavinger in Northumberland and Sprouston, Roxburghshire—requires special treatment here. This is partly because of their intrinsic character, in that they share the

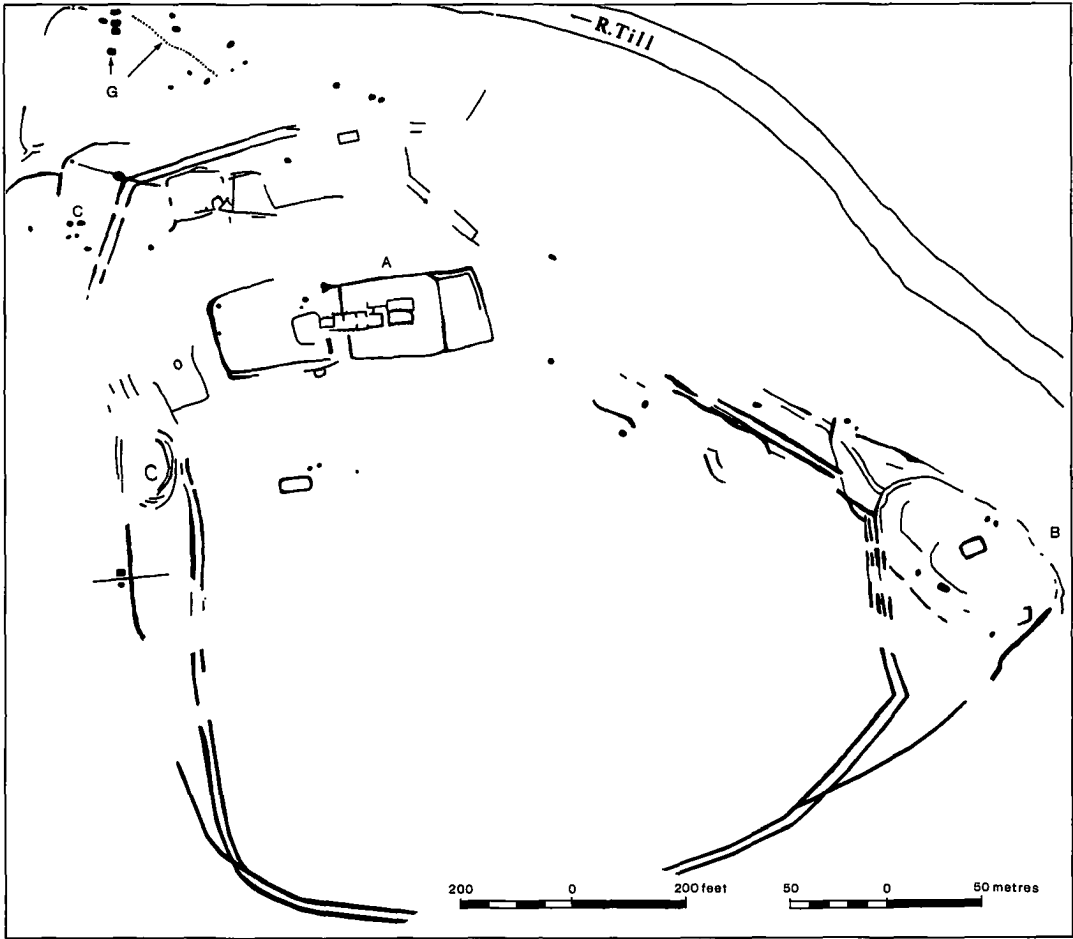
feature of great enclosures in the form of a double palisade enclosing a large area (illus 83), and also some similarities in the plans of associated buildings. While Milfield and Sprouston are known only from aerial photography, Yeavinger, known initially from Bede and subsequently located from the air, was the subject of an excavation which was unusually extensive in area, as well as notable for the meticulous level of recording and analysis, and the breadth of subsequent discussion and synthesis (Hope-Taylor 1977).

These great enclosures are certainly an Anglian development. It has been argued, however, that the Angles had derived the structural concept initially from palisades erected by the Britons during the Roman and early post-Roman centuries; in other words, that the Angles had taken it over from the Britons. In archaeological terms, some support for this hypothesis is given by three small palisaded enclosures, respectively at Sprouston, on Yeavinger Bell and at Doon Hill c (illus 53 above). That at Sprouston (Smith 1991, 270-1) has two lines of palisade closely comparable to those of Harehope II, which dates from the late 1st millennium BC, perhaps extending into the 1st century AD (Feachem 1960). On Yeavinger Bell there is a single palisade of polygonal plan

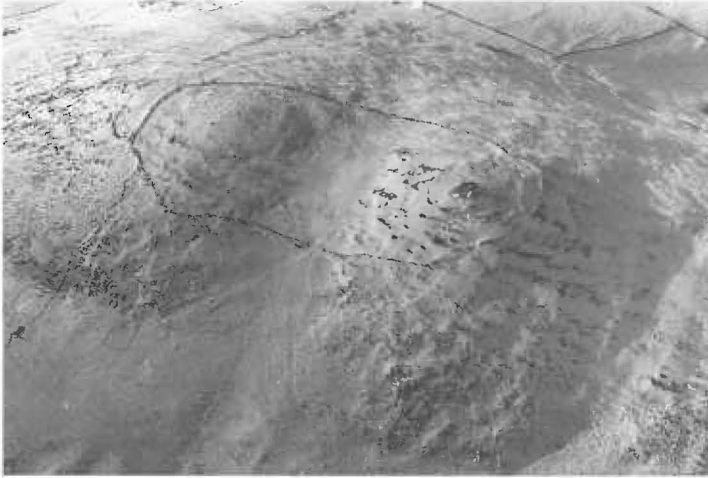




83  
Plans of great enclosures and halls: a) (opposite page) top, Yeavinger PR III C; below, Yeavinger PR IV (after Hope-Taylor 1977); b) (this page) top, Sprouston (after IM Smith 1991); below, Milfield (after Gates & O'Brien 1988).



occupying the eastern summit of the Bell (illus 84). Since it overlies some house-stances of the Roman Iron Age (Jobey 1960, 31-4), it may well date late in that period, and may even have been the stronghold of some British potentate shortly before the founding of the major political centre at the foot of the Bell.



84  
Aerial view of  
Yeavinger Bell.  
Note, on the right-  
hand side (within  
the eastern end of  
the fort), the  
palisade-trench of  
a small polygonal  
enclosure, showing  
against the snow  
(*RCHME*).

trenches (illus 84). It is therefore suggested that the first hall was pre-Anglian, the seat of some British lord. This attribution carries with it the original polygonal palisade (Reynolds 1980).

A powerful support for the hypothesis that the Angles took over the idea of the palisaded defence from the British is that both Yeavinger and Milfield are British-derived names. This suggests that (as at Bamburgh and Dunbar) they had been pre-existing British power centres which, in the instances of Milfield and Yeavinger, had been defended by timber-work, rather than by dry-stone or earthwork defences (Hope-Taylor 1977, 205-9). What can be said with confidence, however, is that the large double-palisaded enclosures at Milfield, Sprouston and Yeavinger are a distinctive Anglian form.

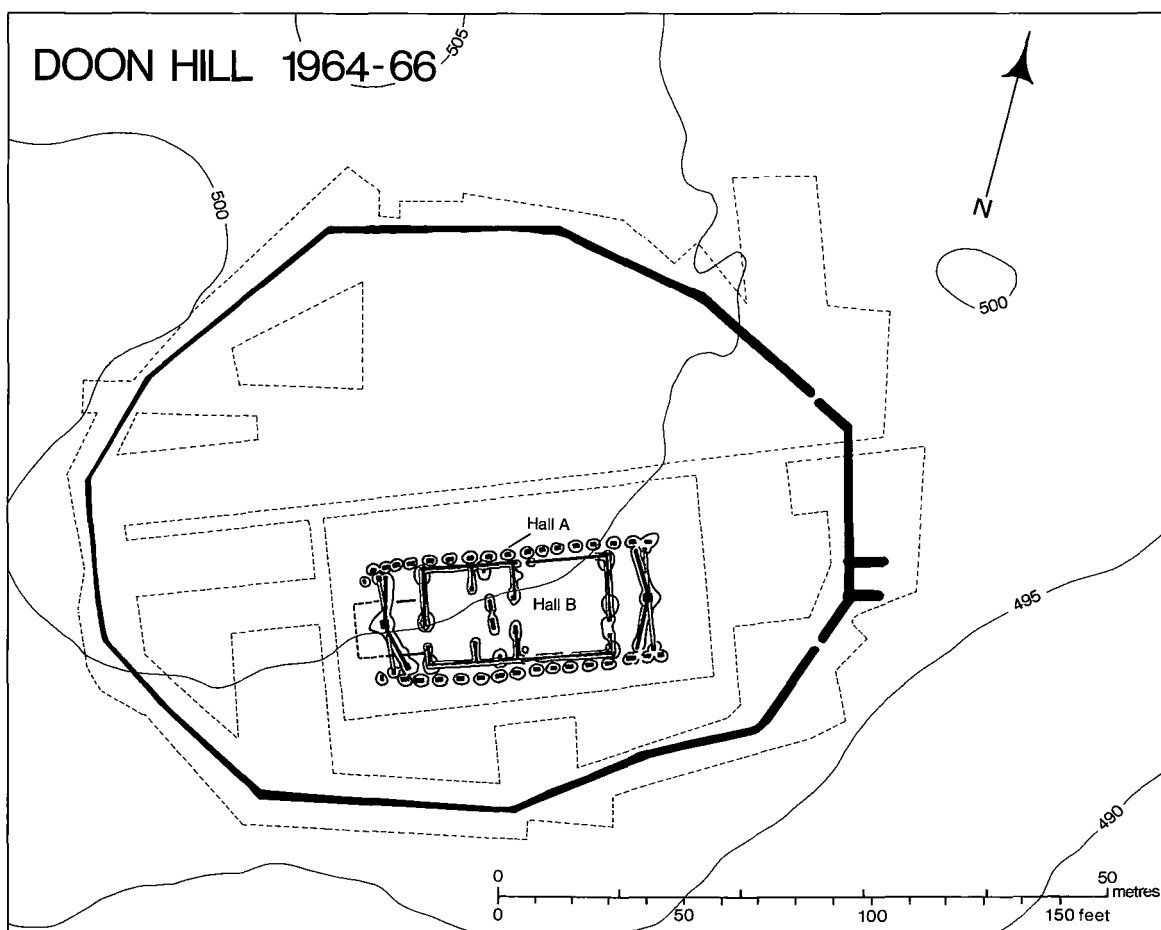
This sub-chapter concentrates on broad aspects of the situation, character and function of the palisaded enclosures and their associated structures, and on the problem of dating. A detailed description and discussion of the great halls in the enclosure at Yeavinger follows below (15.2).

### 15.1.2 Situation of the great enclosures

All three sites lie on valley-bottom gravels, respectively of the Tweed (Sprouston), and of two tributaries, the Till (Milfield) and the Glen (Yeavinger). At their nearest, Sprouston and Yeavinger are about 200m (220yds) distant from the river, while Milfield approaches as close as 150m (165yds) or less. While the other two sites are on more or less level ground, Yeavinger itself is distinguished by occupying a low whaleback at an altitude of 73m (238ft) OD beside the river Glen, and at the foot of a steep slope up to the summit of Yeavinger Bell at 360m (1182 ft) OD. [The statement that Yeavinger itself is 'quite high up in the Cheviots' (J Campbell (ed) 1982, 57) is presumably an error for Yeavinger Bell].

The three sites are all in areas rich in earlier monuments—no doubt a witness to the arable potential of the gravels. Among the earliest of these are a possibly Neolithic enclosure beside the river at Sprouston; and Neolithic/Bronze Age henge monuments at Yeavinger and in the Till valley near Milfield. The latter were later used as burial enclosures for Pagan Angles, to judge from the accompanying grave goods (Scull & Harding 1990).

Even closer to the period of Yeavinger itself is the polygonal palisade at Doon Hill, which was erected on a shelf at about 150m (495ft) below the summit of Doon Hill itself (illus 85). Within the palisade was a two-phase rectangular timber hall. The later of these, Hall B (illus 88 below) has been compared in plan and building-technique with Yeavinger Hall A1(c), attributed to the final phase of that site. The earlier Doon Hill hall, Hall A, though comparable in size, was of quite different construction, using large posts set in separate pits, in contrast with the Yeavinger use of continuous



### 15.1.3 Character and function of the great enclosures

On the air photographs, the great enclosures give the appearance of utter simplicity: an irregular sub-rectangular area enclosed by a double line of fences or palisades. This appearance, however, is false. For a start, what does not appear on the photographs, and was only revealed by excavation, is that the inner line at Yeavinger actually consisted of two close-set trenches. These may possibly have been intended to hold the uprights of a continuous fighting platform, implying a quasi-military purpose.

There are also some surprising differences between the three sites (illus 83). Sprouston and Yeavinger are comparable in size, respectively about 0.75ha (1.85 acres) and 0.70ha (1.7 acres). In plan, Yeavinger is distinguished by bulbous projections either side of the entrance, whereas the entrance at Sprouston cannot be detected in the photographic record. Milfield may be more than ten times larger than either of the other two enclosures, at an estimated area of 10ha (24 acres). It is, however, difficult to be certain about this because the trace of the palisade trenches disappears to the north. It is possible, however, that a range of large buildings enclosed in a single palisade blocked the northern gap.

85  
Doon Hill:  
palisade fortifica-  
tions, with two  
phases of wooden  
halls (after  
Reynolds).

It is not easy to comprehend the function of the double-palisaded enclosures. Since in every case they are peripheral to the main concentration of buildings, and altogether absent in the two latest phases at Yeavinger, it seems impossible to understand them as intended to defend the settlement as a whole. This must be stressed despite the apparently defensive function of the inner line at Yeavinger. At Sprouston and Yeavinger the great enclosures might possibly be seen as stockyards for cattle brought as food-rents to a royal centre. Even more important, for prestige as well as for practical military reasons, would have been to corral the horses of a royal war-band. It is difficult, however, to understand the great extent of the Milfield enclosure in such terms.

The problems of interpreting the function of the great enclosures can be brought into sharper focus by considering another palisaded site in Bernicia, that of *Colodaesburg* (*Coludesburh*), near St Abb's Head (illus 56; Alcock *et al* 1986). The situation could hardly be more different from that of the three valley sites: an isolated hill, dropping vertically into the North Sea, and falling off quite steeply inland as well. The relatively level summit plateau was protected by a double palisade, or possibly by two successive single ones, enclosing about 3ha (7.4 acres). Because the interior has not been excavated, nothing is known about internal structures. The configuration of the terrain on the landward side rules out any possibility of external buildings like those associated with the three great enclosures.

At *Colodaesburg*, the topography itself makes it clear that this was intended to be a readily defended site. This is borne out by the *burg* element in the place-name. After Oswald achieved dominion in AD 634, his sister Æbbe founded a double monastery at *Colodaesburg*, which appears in Bede's Latin as *Urbs Coludi* (*HE* iv, 19). The palisades were later replaced by a monastic *vallum* in the form of a bank of clay and turf with a rough dry-stone revetment. Assuming that Æbbe founded the monastery early in Oswald's reign, then the palisaded site could belong to the period of his predecessor Edwin. This would not conflict with the probable chronology of the Yeavinger great enclosure.

#### 15.1.4 Associated structures: a 'grandstand', temples and halls

Several classes of structure are associated with the great enclosures. Some are probably earlier, some are demonstrably later; but in most cases a chronological relationship cannot be established. They are therefore dealt with by type.

##### The Yeavinger grandstand (illus 83, E; 86,G)

By far the most remarkable and thought-provoking of these structures is the one at Yeavinger which, for convenience, may be designated the 'grandstand'. Indeed, the excavator himself has not hesitated to call it the key feature of Yeavinger (Hope-Taylor 1977). Evidence for this structure appeared already on the first published air view of the site, although it is not alluded to in the description of that photograph (Knowles & St Joseph, 1952, pl facing p 270). It also appears quite clearly in the excavator's report at pl 3, and indeed it should be emphasized that it is a strong feature in the cropmarks. The significance of this is that no similar feature appears at either Milfield or Sprouston, so it can reasonably be regarded as unique to Yeavinger.

Excavation revealed that the crop-marks represented nine trenches in concentric arcs, set out from a large post. Six of the trenches belonged to the original plan, while the

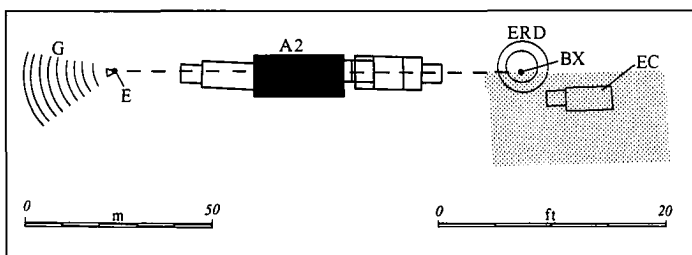
outermost three were additions. The trenches had held substantial vertical timbers, set progressively deeper from front to rear, and therefore implying progressively higher posts. The outermost arc had been buttressed with four large sloping timbers. The excavator's inference was, very reasonably, that 'this was a tiered structure, akin to a grandstand' (Hope-Taylor 1977, 119-24 with figs 55 & 56). Facing the arcs, and incorporating the central post, was a small screened-off area or dais. Apart from the addition of the three rear arcs, the only incident in the history of the grandstand had been a minor fire at its SW corner; the damage caused by this had been readily repaired.

The function of this grandstand had been to provide seating, initially for an estimated 150 people, and subsequently for up to 320. Their attention would have been focused on the dais in front of the centre post, most probably a platform for a single speaker, or at most a very small group. It is significant that the grandstand was sited so as to turn its back, and thereby the backs of the audience, to the prevailing wind. This, however, can hardly have been helpful for the orator or preacher standing on the platform.

This structure is unlike any other known Anglo-Saxon building. It may most reasonably be compared to a *cuneus* (wedge) out of the auditorium of a Roman theatre or amphitheatre, whether of stone or wood; and it is to such a structure that the excavator looked for the ultimate inspiration of the Yeavering grandstand (Hope-Taylor 1977, 241-4). In 1977 it was not possible to point to a suitable example in Britain, but subsequently excavations at Canterbury (Frere 1988) have been interpreted as implying that 'the ruins of the Roman theatre must have dominated the early medieval town...Here the kings of Kent may have met their folk, the *Cantware*' (Brooks 1984, 25). Brooks comments further that 'this perhaps was the early secular and royal centre of *Cantwaraburh* (ie Canterbury), a fitting seat for Æthelbert's *imperium*'.

With relevance to our present study, Brooks goes on to suggest that 'the royal vill of Yeavering was actually provided with an imitation theatre made of wood'. But curiously, he does not go on to notice that a direct link between Canterbury and Yeavering had been forged by Paulinus, evangelist of Northumbria. As an Italian cleric, sent by Pope Gregory in AD 601 to reinforce the original Augustinian mission to Kent, Paulinus would have been familiar with theatres and amphitheatres in Rome, and probably more widely in Italy and even Gaul. He would therefore have recognised the *romanitas* of the Canterbury theatre; and with his colleagues may also have appreciated its usefulness as an auditorium for their preaching.

In late AD 618 or early 619, Paulinus went to Northumbria as chaplain to Edwin's Kentish—and Christian—bride Æthelburh, with the object of converting Edwin (for the date, see Kirby 1963, 522). As queen's chaplain, he would no doubt have accompanied the court on royal progresses such as those which Stephen attributes to Ecgrith and his queen; and in the course of these, he may have seen at Yeavering an excellent location for evangelizing and baptizing the inhabitants of a prosperous region. This sequence of events, though obviously conjectural, provides a reasonable explanation for the construction in Bernicia of the 'imitation theatre made of wood' on a Canterbury, and ultimately Roman, model. In chronological terms, it suggests a date sometime after 619,



86  
The suggested alignment at Yeavering from the grandstand, across the great halls to an early Christian cemetery (after Hope-Taylor).

but before Edwin's conversion in 627/628. We have no corresponding evidence as to how long the grandstand survived, but it was not destroyed in either of the fires which affected other buildings at Yeavinger.

Whatever the precise date and circumstances, we must consider further the significance of the fact that it was specifically a Roman theatre which provided the model for copying. Our guide here must be Krautheimer's introduction to the iconography of medieval architecture (1971, 115-50). Krautheimer emphasizes the symbolic significance of much medieval architecture, and illustrates this with examples of the copying of earlier buildings which were regarded as having some special religious significance.

It can be objected that a theatre as such had no religious relevance; but it may be suggested that it was not the function of the Canterbury theatre which mattered, but its *romanitas*. We shall see later the very great importance that Bede attached to buildings constructed *more Romanorum*, 'in the Roman fashion' (Chapter 17): this is an example of the iconography of architecture in Krautheimer's sense. Paulinus had been sent from the (former) Imperial and Christian capital of Rome to convert the pagan English. The form of the Yeavinger grandstand was a direct reference to the Roman source of his mission.

A further objection to this interpretation might be that the Yeavinger grandstand did not replicate the whole plan of a Roman theatre: there was no proper stage, and the arc of the seating was less than one third of that in a theatre. This objection is not compelling, however, because, as Krautheimer was at pains to demonstrate, complete and faithful copies were not necessary; indeed, individual architects selected specific features from their models while ignoring others. At Yeavinger, the arcs of tiered seating, focused on a screened platform for the speaker, whether bishop or king, were sufficient to represent the Roman iconographic model, while serving perfectly the intended practical function.

If this iconographic interpretation is accepted, then there are further interesting resonances. Firstly, there are the links, forged by the Roman Christian mission, from Rome to Canterbury, and then from Canterbury to Yeavinger. In both Kent and Northumbria, the setting was a secular centre of power, and in each case, the Canterbury folk moot and the Yeavinger grandstand were in a physically central location. But the most striking resonance was at a personal level, which would have been very apparent to Paulinus. The Roman mission to Kent was influenced by Æthelbert's marriage to the Christian daughter of a Frankish king; the mission of Paulinus was helped by Edwin's marriage to the Christian daughter of Æthelbert.

### Temples, cemeteries and churches

At Yeavinger (illus 83, Yeavinger D2), slightly NW of the summit of the whaleback, was a pagan temple complex consisting of the temple itself, with associated human burials and collections of ox skulls; a rather simple hall; and a large kitchen, presumably to cater for ceremonial feasts. These buildings, unlike the great halls along the whaleback (discussed below), were all orientated N-S. Since this temple complex is at the opposite end of the whaleback from the great enclosure, at a distance of at least 160m (175yds), it is unlikely that they were contemporary. Indeed, in terms of layout, the temple complex seems quite separate from the rest of the settlement.

In its final phase, the temple was comprehensively destroyed by fire. It seems appropriate to recall here the burning of the pagan temple at Goodmanham in Deira, on the orders of the high priest Coifi, after Edwin and his chief men had accepted the preaching of Paulinus (*HE* ii, 13). It seems reasonable to ascribe the burning of the Yeavinger temple to the influence of Paulinus.

At the eastern end of the Yeavinger township, the great enclosure was demolished in a late phase of the site's history. Subsequently a cemetery of E-W graves, which may be presumed to be Christian, was laid out over the area (illus 83a, Yeavinger Ba). After many bodies had been buried, a small rectangular building was erected, partially over existing graves. Subsequently a small annexe was added to the west: this may be regarded as a Christian church or oratory. Further bodies were then laid within the church. The initiation of the cemetery may be attributed to Paulinus, but it is likely that it continued in use after his flight from Northumbria in AD 633/634.

At Sprouston a similar inhumation cemetery has been recognised on the air photographs (Smith 1991, 280-1; here illus 83a). It lies SSE of the principal hall, and contained at least 380 graves in rows aligned ENE/WSW. In the southern corner was a small rectangular post-built structure, which may be identified as a church or oratory.

### 'Great halls'

All three of the great enclosures have in their vicinity a number of large, rectangular wooden buildings, often distinguished—even on the air photographs—by heavily buttressed walls. A detailed discussion of plans, superstructure and functions of the Yeavinger buildings are presented below (15.2), together with summary accounts of Milfield and Sprouston. Here we are concerned with their relationship with the great enclosures.

This can only be described as ambiguous. None of the halls can be shown to lie within a great enclosure. At Yeavinger, a sequence of halls, sometimes in pairs linked by fenced courts, is laid out in a line to the west of the enclosure, and just to the north of the main ridge of the whaleback. There is also a group of three lesser halls to the north of the main line, and immediately above the slope to the river Glen.

At Sprouston, air photographs reveal halls with continuous wall trenches, and others raised on separate posts, in a scattered distribution and on various alignments, to the west of the great enclosure. None can be detected within the enclosure itself.

It is at Milfield, however, that the relationship is most ambiguous. There, the double palisades which bounded three sides of the enclosure do not join on the north side. The apparent gap may have been closed by two large fenced courts, in which are two buttressed halls. In other words, the court containing the Milfield great halls may be an integral part of the circuit of the great enclosure. This is not certain, however: firstly, because the traces of the double palisade do not actually extend to the court; and secondly, because beyond the court to the north, there are other double fence lines, which might be the completion of the north side of the great enclosure, but which do not closely align with it.

The general conclusion can only be that the function of the great enclosures was emphatically not to protect the great halls.

A further point must be made about the layout of the halls. At Sprouston, as already indicated, this is erratic: the most impressive hall being on an E-W alignment, the others at 45° either side of that. At Milfield, a major buttressed hall is aligned E-W, as is the minor hall adjacent to it. At Yeavinger there is a sequence of four phases of hall building, all on the same alignment, so that the earlier halls are actually buried beneath the later ones. Since this overlapping was already evident on the Yeavinger air photographs, its absence in the cases of Milfield and Sprouston must be accepted as a true indication that there were no superpositions at those sites.

Apart from this congruent alignment of the individual halls, there is a much longer alignment at Yeavinger (illus 86). This runs from the post which was the focal point of the geometry of the grandstand (Post E), along the centre lines of the halls A2 and A4, to a post raised within the so-called Eastern Ring-ditch (Post BX), a total distance of nearly 110m (120yds). The eastern marker also determined the northern fence line of the eastern cemetery.

The excavator appears not to have regarded Post E as part of this alignment. To accept it as such would require that it had been sighted from Post BX along the centre line through Hall A2. If we accept one of the excavator's alternative explanations of a wood-and-metal object in grave AX—namely that it was a surveyor's cross-staff (Hope-Taylor 1977, 202)—then both the technical skills and the necessary equipment for such a sight-line were available. The implication is that Post E—and with it the grandstand—was an early element in the layout of the series of great halls.

### 15.1.5 Chronology

Evidence for dating the great enclosures is both meagre and controversial. Bede's account of Yeavinger (*HE* ii, 14) must be the starting point for any discussion. He provides four items of chronological information:

- 1) after Edwin's conversion in AD 626/7, he and his queen were sometimes in residence at Yeavinger—that is within the period 626/7 to 632/3;
- 2) Paulinus once spent 36 days there, catechizing crowds from the vicinity, and baptizing them in the river Glen, giving the same dating-bracket;
- 3) after the death of Edwin, the township (*villa*) was deserted 'in the time of the following kings', *tempore sequentium regum*;
- 4) another township was built instead at a place called *Maelmin*, (*alia pro illa* [=Yeavinger] *est facta in...Maelmin*), which in modern times has been identified with the site discovered from the air at Milfield (Knowles & St Joseph 1952, 270).

The implication of the last point—that Milfield was built after the abandonment of Yeavinger—can be falsified from the evidence of air photographs. These show, as a central feature of Milfield, two massively-buttressed timber buildings (Gates & O'Brien 1988, 3) comparable in that respect with building A4 at Yeavinger. This was built in phase Post Roman IIIC, which in turn was followed by two further building phases at Yeavinger (Hope-Taylor 1977, espec 161-8).

The third chronological statement—that Yeavinger was abandoned *in tempore sequentium regum*—is ambiguous. Does it mean in AD 633/4, in the time of the two apostate kings, Eanfrid and Osric, who succeeded Edwin; or, as some have thought, at the time

of Oswald (reigned AD 634–42) or even Oswiu (642–70)? Though Jones (1968, 176) does not specifically discuss the date, he places it among those which he calls ‘uncertain date’ or ‘vague reference’. He does, however, refer to the catastrophic nature of the events at the end of Edwin’s reign (*HE* ii, 14 & 20) as a reason for Bede’s chronological uncertainty.

Of the whole passage, only the first two items have any claim on our belief in chronological terms, essentially because of the importance of Edwin’s conversion in the history of Northumbria, and the reputation of Paulinus himself (on this see further Jones 1968, 174–6; Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 74–5).

It is important also to recognize what Bede does *not* say about Yeavinger. He does not record that the township was burned during the ravaging of Northumbria by the British king Cadwallon, in which Edwin himself was killed. This is despite the fact that, immediately after the paragraph in which he mentions the desertion of Yeavinger, he expressly refers to the total destruction by fire of the royal township of *Campodunum*, including its *basilica*, at the hands of the *pagani* (*sic*) who slew Edwin (*HE* ii, 14). It will be recalled that, in discussing Cadwallon’s ravaging of Northumbria, we found no evidence that he had ever crossed The Cheviots (above 10.2).

Furthermore, Bede reports no later hostile firings of Yeavinger, for instance in the course of one of the Mercian ravagings which did allegedly involve attacks by fire on Bamburgh and its vicinity (*HE* iii, 16–7). There is therefore no support in the written sources for an attempt to calibrate the archaeologically-established conflagrations at Yeavinger with any known or inferred historical events.



This discussion of the possible historical evidence and its gaps may seem unnecessarily detailed, protracted, and above all, negative. It can claim, however, to be the first reasoned critique of the implications of the written sources since the publication of the Yeavinger excavations (Hope-Taylor 1977, espec 277).

Archaeological evidence for dating Yeavinger, and by implication, the group as a whole, is even more scanty and ambiguous than the historical evidence, comprising as it does two metal objects. The first is an iron buckle-loop, inlaid probably with silver, found in the demolition layers of the Great Enclosure. The manufacture of this may be dated between *c* AD 570–80 and *c* 630–40 (or more probably between *c* 600 and *c* 630/40) (Welch 1984; see also Hawkes 1981). Because comparable buckles are most common in Kent, it has reasonably been suggested that it may have come to Yeavinger in the train of Edwin’s Kentish bride, and her chaplain Paulinus, in AD 618/619. This suggests that the demolition of the Great Enclosure took place after that date. It also seems to be consistent with the laying out of a Christian cemetery impinging on the site of the demolished enclosure.

The second object was a gold-washed copper-alloy copy of a Merovingian coin stratified in the hall designated A3(b) (Hope-Taylor 1977, 183; 185–6). The Merovingian prototype appears to belong to the 630s and 640s (Hope-Taylor 1977, 183): but we have no precise means of assessing the date either of the copy, or of its deposition, which may even have been in the second half of the 7th century. (I am most grateful to Dr DM Metcalf for his helpful comments on the coin).

Both of these artefactual dates would allow some phases of the Yeavinger buildings to be contemporary with the visits of Paulinus and Edwin in the 620s and early 630s AD. On the other hand, the coin would more reasonably imply continued occupation, at a level wealthy enough to possess the coin, into the 640s or later; that is, certainly into the reign of Oswald (AD 634-642), and possibly into that of his successor Oswiu (AD 642-670).

Given the meagreness of the archaeological evidence, and the ambiguities and silences of the written evidence, it seems hazardous to essay an alternative interpretation of the chronology of Yeavinger. None the less, an attempt should be made, however conjectural. The present account relies heavily on the links, personified by Paulinus, between Rome, Canterbury, and Yeavinger.

In AD 618/619, Paulinus came to Northumbria as chaplain to Edwin's bride, Æthelburh. In the course of royal progresses, he came to Yeavinger, a royal centre with a large hall, A2, as well as a notable pagan temple complex and a large double-palisaded enclosure. Probably in the course of visits over several years, Paulinus may have been instrumental in the burning of the temple. The existing religious significance of Yeavinger was maintained, however, influenced perhaps by the attraction of the river Glen for baptizing converts (cf Mark 1:5 & 9 with *HE* ii, 14).

Under the influence of Paulinus, the Roman-style grandstand was built as his preaching station. Sometime in the 620s AD, the Great Enclosure was demolished, and a cemetery was established across its circuit. Subsequently, and very probably while Paulinus was still active in Northumbria, a church was set up within the cemetery, built of wood like Edwin's baptismal church in York (*HE* ii, 14). Over this period too, hall A2 was replaced by hall A4, which was carefully aligned on the earlier hall.

After Edwin's death, the flight of Paulinus and Æthelburh, and Cadwallon's ravaging of Northumbria (which did not penetrate to the valley of the Tweed and its tributaries), Yeavinger continued to serve as a royal township. This period (Phases Post-Roman IV and V) saw the building, on a new plan, of Hall A3(a). This was replaced by the slightly smaller hall A3(b), coin-dated at the earliest to the 630s AD. These two late halls may reasonably be assigned to Oswald, and probably to Oswiu as well.

More exceptional than the buildings already described are several small sunken-floored buildings at Milfield, and a group of larger ones at Yeavinger, where they may be part of a pagan temple complex. Both at Yeavinger and Sprouston there are cemeteries with E-W orientated burials, which are probably therefore Christian. In that case, the small rectangular buildings beside the cemeteries are likely to be churches.

## 15.2 YEAVINGER AND OTHER GREAT HALLS: LAYOUT AND STRUCTURES, FUNCTIONS AND SYMBOLISM

### 15.2.1 Layout and structures

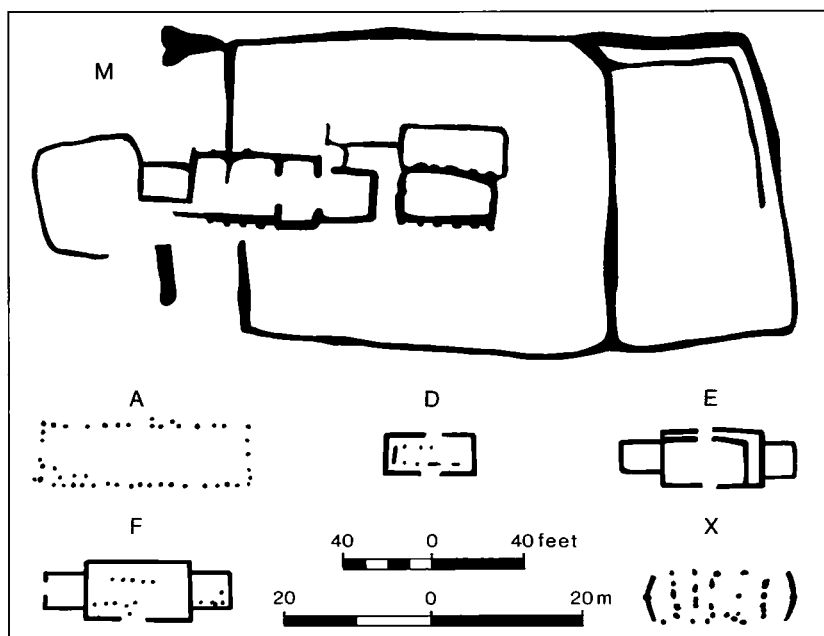
The first archaeological discoveries of early Anglo-Saxon buildings were all of the sunken-floored class, frequently known by the German term *Grubenhäuser* (fuller account, 16.2 below). One of the earliest recognitions of structures without sunken floors was at West Stow in Suffolk. There, in addition to at least 34 *Grubenhäuser*, plans of

three rectangular timber buildings without internal pits were recovered (West 1969; West *et al* 1985). Perhaps because of the contrast with the *Grubenhäuser* (which had often ended their days as rubbish pits), these above-ground buildings were called 'halls' [West's quotation marks] by the excavator. This tentative designation rapidly hardened into the more affirmative term: halls without quotation marks, with resonances of Heorot, the king's feasting hall in the Beowulf epic. So any rectangular timber building over 6m (20ft) in length came to be called a hall; while anything over 15m (50ft) may be seen as a veritable Heorot (but see a more balanced view in Wilson 1976, 91).

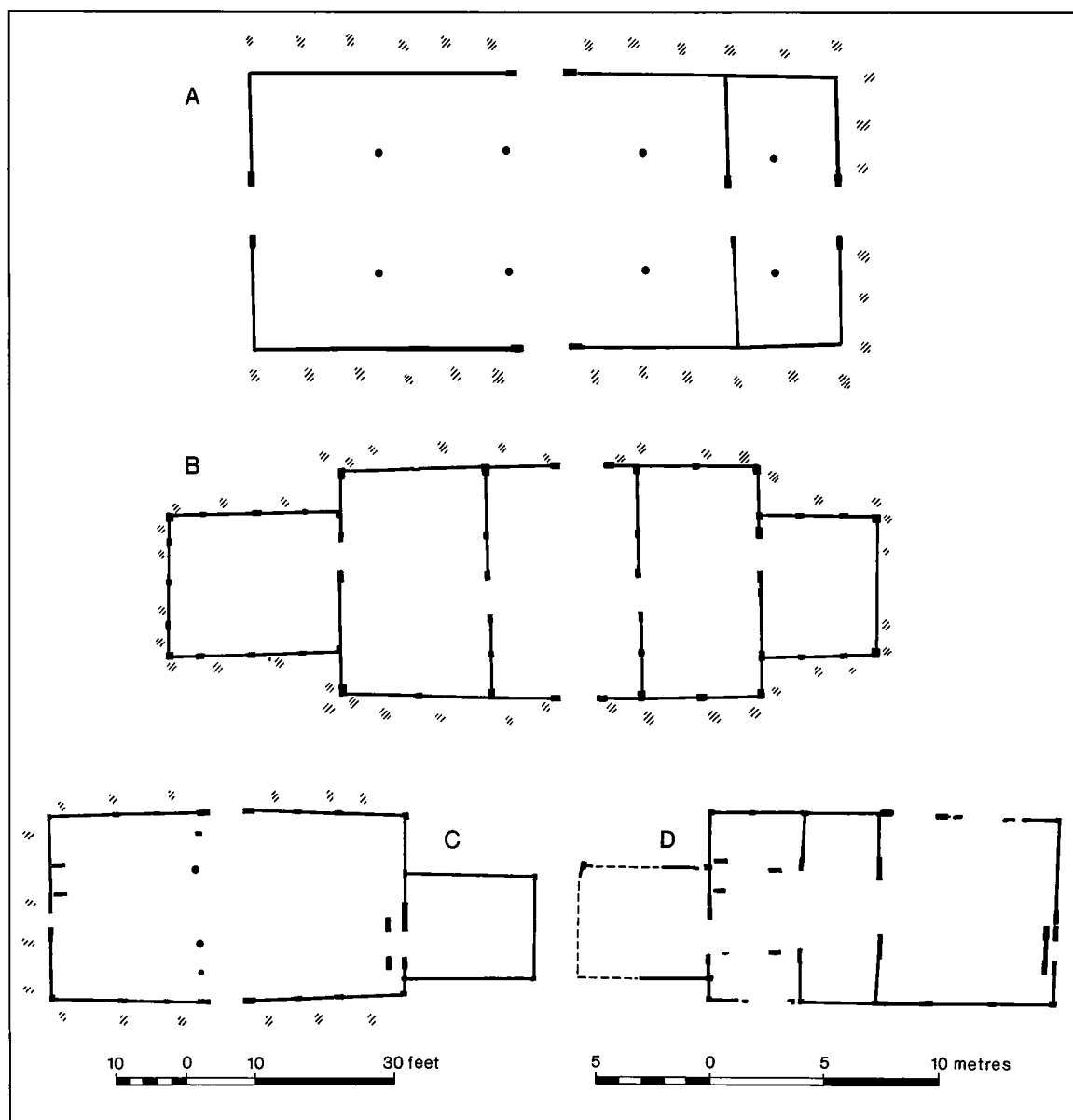
There are, however, some Early Historic buildings which do match dictionary definitions of a hall as 'the residence of a territorial proprietor, a large building for the transaction of public business, a large public room for banquets etc.' (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). Such definitions would accord with the impressions derived from both Old English and Old Welsh poetry. The relevant archaeological examples might include, among the Britons, the excavated examples of Doon Hill A and Cadbury Castle, Somerset; and, known only from air photographs, a phase 1 hall at Sprouston (illus 87A). Among the Angles of Bernicia, buildings which merit the title are known from the air at Milfield and Yeavinger, south of the Tweed, and at Sprouston in the middle Tweed valley.

At Yeavinger, as we have seen above, technically brilliant excavations by Dr B Hope-Taylor in the 1950s uncovered a group of buildings stretching for about 350m (1150ft) along a whaleback ridge, overlooking the river Glen (illus 83a). These have been divided by the excavator, partly on grounds of superposition, partly on structural typology, into six main post-Roman phases. From east to west, the buildings are: the palisaded enclosure (Hope-Taylor phases I-IIIc); a putative church and Christian cemetery (phases IV-V); the core of the settlement, a group of large buildings with attached courtyards, rebuilt several times on the same alignment (phases I-II? and IIIAB-V); an assembly-stand (phases II-IV) and a pagan temple complex (phases II-IIIc). In addition, in phases IV-V, there were other rectangular buildings to the NW of the main group.

The present summary account, based primarily on the details of the excavator's published plans and sections, concentrates on three characteristic examples from the mature and penultimate phases of Yeavinger: namely, Hall A4 from the mature phase, Post-Roman III C; and Halls A3(a) and C4(a) from the penultimate one, Post-Roman IV (illus 88).



87  
Timber halls  
recognized from  
crop-marks; M)  
Milfield; A, D, E,  
F) principal  
Sprouston halls;  
X) outlying  
building at  
Sprouston,  
assigned to  
Phase 1.



88  
Plans of Weaving  
halls: A) A4, B)  
A3a and C) C4a  
(after Hope-  
Taylor); D) Doon  
Hill hall B (after  
Reynolds 1980).

There were two distinct classes of hall-plan. In phases IIIAB and IIIC, they were simple rectangles. The earlier, A2, had a sub-divided courtyard to its east. The later, A4, was linked by a court to a smaller rectangular hall, A1(a). The second class, characteristic of phases IV and V, had end chambers (miscalled annexes despite the fact that they were part of the original plan) at one or both ends: these were accessible only from inside the building. In phases IV and V there was a larger hall (A3(a)/A3(b)) joined by a court to a smaller one (A1(b)/A1(c)).

Hall A4 was not only slightly larger than its precursor A2; it was altogether more massively built. Indeed, it is probably the most massive secular building known from

northern Britain in the Early Historic centuries. It was planned as about 24.4m by 11.3m (80ft by 37ft), with an overall floor area of about 275m<sup>2</sup> (3000sq ft). A single compartment at the east end, however, reduced the clear area of the main hall to about 226m<sup>2</sup> (2430sq ft).

The walls were made of planks about 280 x 140mm (11 x 5.5in) in cross-section, set in a continuous trench about 1.9m (6ft 3in) deep for the long walls, and as much as 2.4m (8ft) deep for the gables. There were 12 large buttressing posts along each side, and six supporting the gables, set well out from the wall face in pits up to 1.0m (3ft 3in) in depth. As with A2, there was a central door in each wall, about 2m (6ft 6in) wide between the jambs in the gables, and a little over 1.5m (5ft) in the long walls. Internally, there were two rows, each of four posts, to support the roof. Evidence for a raised floor, which had been recorded in A2, was lacking, because much of the interior had been disturbed by the wall trenches of later halls. There was some slight evidence for wall plaster.

Hall A4 had been very closely aligned on A2, and this led the excavator to the reasonable conclusion that the earlier building was still standing as the later was being erected. However that may be, A2 was then demolished, and in its place there was an open court which was never built over during the subsequent history of Yeavinger.

At the west end of the court, however, Hall A1(a) was built as a satellite of A4. Like A2 and A4 it was a simple rectangular hall, with a door in each wall, and a floor area of about 100m<sup>2</sup> (1100sq ft). There is no clear evidence of internal divisions, though two pairs of arcade posts may also have served to divide it into a vestibule on the east and two larger rooms. Despite its relatively small size it was quite massively built, with timber planks up to 150mm (6in) thick, set as much as 1.2m (4ft) deep in a continuous trench; basically, that is, the same massive construction technique as A2 and A4. It was, moreover, quite heavily buttressed, apparently with double supports at the corners and at least four along each long wall.

Further discussion of the layout and function of Hall A4 must now be deferred until the structures of the second group, those of phases Post Roman IV and V, have been described. Buildings A3(a) and A3(b) were smaller, less substantial, and less accurately laid out than A4 which they overlay. They also present a marked change of plan from a simple, rather wide rectangle to a narrower oblong with chamber at each end. In plan, the successive A3 buildings had the impressive overall length of 30.5m (100ft), but the external effect was somewhat diminished by the narrower, and presumably lower, end chambers. The main hall itself was divided into three chambers by transverse partitions, so that the largest room—that to the west of the entrance hall—had a floor area of no more than 65m<sup>2</sup> (700 sq ft).

The exterior walls were made of planks about 114mm (4.4in) thick, set in a continuous trench about 1m (3ft 3in) deep. Both exterior walls and internal partitions were straight, but few of the junctions were at exact right angles. (A similar comment might no doubt be made about the rooms in substantial mid-Victorian town houses). There were external buttress posts, but no internal arcade posts as such; the posts of the transverse partition would, however, have served as roof supports. The only doors were in the long walls, so that the only access to the end chambers was from the central area, through doors offset from those in the transverse partitions. In building A 3(b), internal movement was even less direct, because the doors through the partitions were themselves offset from each other.

Yeavinger comparisons

This account of the most significant group on the central ridge of the Yeavinger whale-back provides a basis for comparison with buildings at Milfield and Sprouston which are known only from air photographs (illus 87). The comparisons are best presented in the following table (Table 6):

Table 6  
Comparisons of  
building features at  
Yeavinger with  
Milfield and  
Sprouston  
Key: + = present  
o = absent

	Axial Layout	Buttresses visible	Courts	End- chambers	Over-laying
Milfield	+	+	+	+	o
Sprouston	o	o	o	+	+

Sources: Milfield: Gates & O'Brien 1988, fig 1; Knowles & St Joseph 1952, pl 125; St Joseph 1982, pl IIIb. Sprouston: Smith 1991; St Joseph 1982, pl IV

It will be seen from the table that Milfield presents more similarities with Yeavinger than does Sprouston, despite the fact that fewer buildings appear on the published photographs of Milfield. A second difference can only be appreciated from Smith's rectified interpretation plans and comments: namely, that Sprouston exhibits several features which are not recognizable on the other sites (Smith 1991, 276-80).

The most important of the Sprouston crop-mark sites are as follows. Sprouston buildings A and B, respectively c 28 x 9m (90 x 30 ft) and 20 x 7m (65 x 23ft) overall, were raised in separate post-pits as opposed to continuous wall trenches. Building D1 has internal features, possibly suggesting an aisled superstructure, which can only be confirmed by excavation. Sprouston E is a two-phased structure comprising a main hall and a single, narrower, end-chamber, comparable with Yeavinger C4(a) and Doon Hill B (Smith 1991, illus 9). Building F has arcade-posts in both the main hall and the end chambers, perhaps as many as two rows of ten posts in the 14m (45ft) length of the main room. Finally, there are a surprising number of crop-marks which seem to indicate *Grubenhäuser* quite close to the main buildings, whereas at Milfield such lowly structures are rather distant, and at Yeavinger normal *Grubenhäuser* seem to be absent.

The obvious conclusion from this brief survey of features special to Sprouston, at least as far as the evidence of air photography takes us, is that we still have much to learn about the repertory of the king's architects in Early Historic Bernicia. Moreover, excavation of the crop-mark indications at both Milfield and Sprouston may confidently be expected to lead to further surprises, as well as some answers to existing problems.

15.2.2 Functions of the Great Hall

Before we can consider how the principal excavated buildings on the Yeavinger whale-back might have been used, we must first examine the contemporary written evidence about 'great halls' in general.

The common image of the great hall, derived from both Germanic and Celtic heroic literature, is as a place for feasting and carousing. There is, of course, much truth in this: but it misses the primary domestic role of the hall. This was, after all, the home—even if only periodically—of the king, queen and their family, as well as of nobles, and perhaps some lesser soldiery. This is very clear in *Beowulf* (ll.1232, 1242), where after the

banquet and wine-drinking, the king retires to his bed-chamber, while his followers move aside the feasting benches and lay out pillows and mattresses. Their weapons, however, were laid on the benches beside them.

That said, it cannot be denied that the evening had largely been given over to feasting and carousing: comparable with the wine-feast or mead-feast of Aneirin, for instance. The background to this, of course, would have been the recitation of heroic songs, to the music of the lyre among the Anglo-Saxons, and the harp among the Picts and Scots (below, 23.1.2). These activities would have led to social bonding, with the strong political and military themes which were the cement of heroic kingship: themes such as paying for one's mead—that is, by death in battle—and the giving of jewellery and weapons. In addition to the king's immediate followers, there are likely to have been other persons of rank in the hall, with whom it was desirable to forge similar links. Firstly, there might be honoured guests like Beowulf and his war-band. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica* there are frequent mentions of exiles, often the sons of dispossessed dynasties, who might be plotting a mutually useful restoration with their hosts. In both Welsh and Irish law-tracts there are references to arrangements for the fosterage of the sons of dependants (Jenkins 1986, 126; Kelly 1988, 86–90), which are likely to have applied also to the northern Britons and the Irish of Scottish Dál Riata. Finally, there were hostages—pledges for the good behaviour of neighbouring kingdoms. In Ireland a king was expected to have hostages in fetters in his feasting hall—a curiously ambiguous position for the hostages (Kelly 1988, 173–5)—whereas in Wessex a hostage was expected to fight to the death on behalf of his host (*ASC* s a 755).

Even from this cursory survey, it is clear that a very varied collection of persons might be present in a great hall. One common element emerges strongly: namely, that they were predominantly male. The great hall was a man's world. Given, moreover, the heady mixture of youth, mead, and heroic valour, it might be expected that boisterous behaviour would have been the norm as the evening wore on (Bullough 1991 for some extreme examples). There was, at least in *Beowulf*, a strong moderating element: the presence of the king's wife or daughter as a chief dispenser of wine or mead. In several passages, the gracious hospitality of the royal consort or daughter is stressed (eg *Beowulf*, ll.620; 1980).

Again, in the Bernicia of kings Oswald and Oswin, the austere bishop Aidan was prepared to dine occasionally in the hall. His main concern was to avoid the luxurious levels of eating which might be expected at the royal table; despite this, he was prepared to bless a silver dish of rich food. Moreover, he regularly resided at royal estate centres (*villae regiae*) when travelling on his preaching missions. His very presence would doubtless have given some guarantee of a standard of propriety (*HE* iii, 5; 6; 14; 17. Commentary by Mayr-Harting 1991, 94–9). These Bedean anecdotes are cited in this section at face value, but with the recognition that there are no means of checking them nor of knowing their ultimate source.

Another probable use of the great hall was as a place for holding councils, such as that at which Edwin consulted his friendly chieftains and counsellors (*cum amicis principibus et consiliariis suis*: *HE* ii, 13) about the teaching of the missionary Paulinus. Each one of the council—including, very interestingly, Coifi, the chief of the pagan priests—was asked for his views on the new religion. We can only surmise that the kind of building in which this debate took place was indeed a great hall. It would also seem reasonable to believe that the royal acts of promulgating laws and pronouncing judgements would require a similar setting.

But not all the activities in the hall were either of high solemnity or disorderly carousing. In the middle of one of the most significant of Bede's anecdotes about the relationship of Aidan and Oswin, we learn that the king and his nobles, having just returned from hunting, were warming themselves at the feasting-hall fire (*HE* iii, 14). It is not often that Bede gives us such a human vignette, but it is enough to remind us that much of the life and activity within a hall must have been quite informal.



So far, this account of the activities in a great hall has dealt with behaviour which might at times have been boisterous, but which was at least peaceful. In contrast, we must now record an action which was the very opposite. This occurred in Wessex in AD 786 at a rather minor hall, namely, the bower of a king's mistress. A dispossessed heir-apparent (*atheling*) had learned that the king, visiting his mistress, was accompanied by only a small band. He therefore attacked the king in the bower, slaying him, and subsequently his immediate followers. The following day the king's main war-band came up and slew in turn the would-be usurper and his followers. In effect, the hall was the scene of a two day battle, which might have changed the ruling dynasty in Wessex (*EHD*, 175-6; note espec p 176, n 1; also 180).

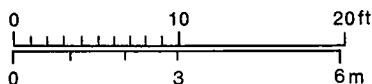
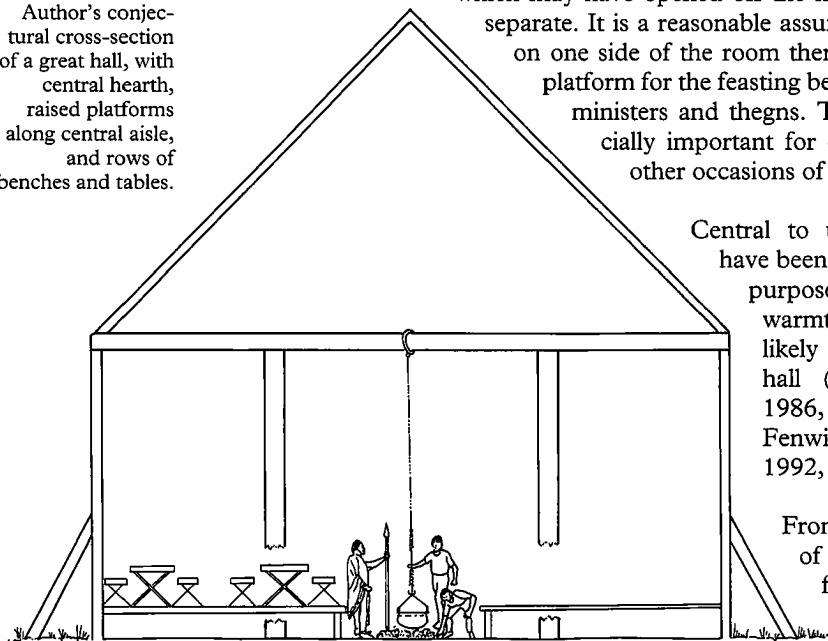
From this survey of the recorded usages of a great hall, we may now consider the architectural features that were required in order to meet its purpose or functions (illus 89). The most obvious was a room large enough for setting out feasting benches during the day and also to accommodate sleeping warriors at night. The king and his family would

have required sleeping chambers with some degree of privacy, which may have opened off the hall, or may have been quite separate. It is a reasonable assumption—but no more—that on one side of the room there would have been a raised platform for the feasting bench of the king and his chief ministers and thegns. This would have been especially important for controlling councils and on other occasions of royal business.

Central to the accommodation would have been a large hearth. One obvious purpose for this would have been for warmth. In addition, some food is likely to have been cooked in the hall (summary account, Evans 1986, 77-81; details, Evans 1983b, Fenwick 1983; discussion, Werner 1992, 11-5).

From *Beowulf* we gain a picture of the external appearance of a feasting hall—or at least, poetic statements about an idealized hall, king Hrothgar's Heorot. Since Hrothgar had intended it to be the greatest known to

89  
Author's conjectural cross-section of a great hall, with central hearth, raised platforms along central aisle, and rows of benches and tables.



mankind, we should not expect it to be fully paralleled at Yeavinger; but nonetheless the poem does generate a belief that a royal hall should look impressive, towering aloft, with wide gables and gleaming with gold as it appeared to Beowulf's companions (*Beowulf*, ll. 81-2; 308).

### 15.2.3 Great halls at Yeavinger

We are now in a position to ask which of the buildings on the Yeavinger whaleback match the specifications which might be compiled on the basis of the contemporary written evidence, both poetry and prose.

To start with external appearances, buildings A2, A3(a), and A4 are all impressively large. The least impressive are the successive versions of A3, whereas A4 is the most grandiose. Admittedly, a modern commentator may be particularly impressed by features which were not evident to a 7th-century observer, namely, the thickness of the timbers, and the great depth to which they were sunk in the ground. On the other hand, the massive character of the buttresses of hall A4 would have given an immediate visual impression of rugged strength.

Another external feature which would have been visible to a contemporary, but which for us is speculative, was the height of the walls and the roof. From the length of the suspension chain of the large feasting-cauldron at Sutton Hoo, it has reasonably been conjectured that the height of the tie-beam of a royal hall would have been at least 5m (16.5ft) above the floor (Evans 1986, 79-81), so this gives us a minimum height for the wall. Taking then a conservative roof angle of 45°, the apex of the roof would have been at a height of about 11m (36ft) (illus 89). Published reconstructions have normally suggested a higher angle of slope (eg Hope-Taylor 1977, pls 105-107; Dunn in Welch 1992, pl 1) but this appears to be related to a modern wish to enhance the building, rather than to any structural imperative.

On the basis of the excavator's plans, we may speculate on the internal arrangements. Internally there were major differences between structures A2 and A4 on the one hand, and the two A3 buildings on the other. Firstly, buildings A2 and A4 were entered through a door in a lofty gable. In A2 the visitor passed through a vestibule before entering the main room; but in A4 it appears that he went immediately into a large space, probably open to a lofty roof tree. In the centre was a hearth with a great cauldron, as a very material symbol of a lord's hospitality. On either side there were raised floors, on which stood tables and benches capable of seating upwards of 110 persons in A2 and about 150 in A4. Facing the main axial entrance there may have been a higher raised platform with superior, more commodious tables and benches: perhaps even chairs, especially for the king. Here both the king's superior status and his hospitality were well displayed.

In the case of the A3 buildings, however, as we have already noticed, access was not through a gable-end door, but in the long side, and led into a suite of three interconnecting rooms. The largest of these had a floor area of no more than 65m<sup>2</sup> (700sq ft). At either end were yet smaller chambers with no external access. It is difficult to imagine where either the main hearth, or the king's table, might have been placed, especially because of the off-set lines of movement through the building. The central room would have been inconvenient because of both draughts and traffic. We may conjecture that the king's table would have been at the northern end of the western room, with benches

and tables for the follower's around the other three walls. However that may be, it is certain that buildings A3(a) and (b) lacked the impressive public room of A2 and A4, and could only have accommodated a relatively small number of people.

A feature common to all these buildings was a fenced courtyard. In the case of A2, this opened off the chamber at the east end of the hall; that is, behind the presumed location of the king's table. The yard itself was divided by a fence a third of the way along. In the case of A4 and the A3 buildings, the court linked the main building with the A1 series of satellites. We may speculate that the A1(a) building of Period IIIC housed the king's retiring apartment mentioned in *Beowulf* (ll.1232).

There is a curious difference, however, in the access between the public and private buildings in the A4 and A3 phases. From A4 there was direct access from the west gable door, across the court to the east gable door of A1(a). But because neither the A3 buildings, nor their A1 satellites, had gable doors, it was necessary to go outside the court to get from one to the other. In addition to the convenience of mutual access in the case of A4/A1(a), it seems likely that one purpose of the courtyards was as a meeting place for ceremonial or ritual gatherings.

In conclusion: there is a marked difference in terms of both royal dignity and convenience between A2 and A4 on the one hand and A3(a) and (b) on the other. The first two thoroughly deserve the designation of great hall, but a question mark remains over the other two. This is principally because of the difficulty of understanding how they could have served both the domestic needs and the more elevated functions of a royal hall.

#### 15.2.4 The symbolism of the hall

The great hall provided powerful symbols, both positive and negative, for both Celtic and Germanic peoples—as well, of course, as for many other peoples and literatures.

In *Y Gododdin*, the hall was a place of heroic renown. A chain of linked stanzas, numbers 36-39, referring to the hall of Din Eidyn, assert that 'Never was built a hall so renowned, so great, so mighty for slaughter, so famous, so lively' (Jarman, 1988, 24-7). It is no surprise that one role of the Gododdin war-band was 'defending the...mead of Eidyn' (stanza 92). More unusual is the epithet 'Eidyn of the goldsmiths' (stanza 19).

A non-martial symbol was that of the hall as a place of everyday security. The classic instance of this is the speech which Bede attributed to one of Edwin's counsellors during the debate on the acceptance of Christianity. The hall is presented as a place of warmth and calm, while outside wintry storms of rain and snow are raging (*HE* ii, 13). Several levels of imagery are developed during the speech, but here we are concerned only with two of them. On the simplest level, the hall does indeed furnish protection from foul weather, and more positively, it is a place of warmth and conviviality. But on a deeper level, the storms are themselves a metaphor of the threat of political and military storms from which the hall may provide protection. This concept is far removed from the extravert bellicose imagery of *Y Gododdin*.

The sense of security may, of course, have been illusory, as it was for the warriors in Hrothgar's hall. The banquet had been of the choicest, and men had been drinking, unaware of their destiny, and 'the grim preordained decree'. At this point in the recita-

tion, the audience would recall what that grim decree was: the return of slaughter to Heorot in the person of Grendel's mother (*Beowulf*, ll.1232 ff.). This is only one of the instances in *Beowulf* where it appears that the protection of the hall is not absolute; the symbol has an ambivalent aspect.

It follows that the symbol of the hall has a negative side, related to the loss of all that the hall-society offered. This theme was popular among the Anglo-Saxons, and it also provided some moving verses in the post-heroic saga-poetry of the Welsh. In old English, *The Ruin* is probably the best known poem which explores the theme. On the whole its subject is the collapse of Romanised cities; but relevant here is a passing reference to 'many a mead-hall filled with human revelry—until mighty Fate changed that' (Bradley 1995, 402).

The most extended Anglo-Saxon treatment of the theme is the poem known as *The Wanderer*, the lament of a man who has lost his lord, his friends, his home, the hall. So detailed is the account of his woes that it is possible to compile from them an inventory of the hall and all the benefits which it bestowed. He asks 'where has gone the steed?...the giver of treasure?...the place of banquets?...the pleasures of the hall?' But most of all he laments the loss of the lord, who 'would acknowledge (his) love in the mead-hall' (Bradley 1995, 320-5).

Among the Welsh, in the saga-poetry attributed to the 9th century (Jarman 1992, 81-97), the concept of the hall as a symbol of security is similarly reinforced by references to halls that had been deserted or destroyed. The first quotation given here is in itself typical of the age-old tradition of poets mourning the loss of the glories of times past: the theme of 'Where are the snows of yesteryear'.

Many a lively hound and spirited hawk  
were fed on its floor  
before this place was ruins  
(Rowland 1990, 481)

The second quotation, by contrast, is wholly personal: the lament of Heledd, princess of Powys, after the slaying of her brother Cynddylan and the burning of their court:

Dark is the hall of Cynddylan tonight  
Without fire, without bed.  
I weep awhile, then am I silent  
(after Jarman 1992, 93)

This is one of the most moving stanzas in the whole body of early Welsh poetry. It constitutes in itself a fitting epitaph to the Heroic Age.

Quite different aspects of conscious symbolism may be suspected in the layout of the Yeaving great halls. As we have seen, special care was taken to align hall A4 on its predecessor A2 (even if, in the event, the fit was not perfect). Moreover, this was only the central section of a longer alignment which extended from the grandstand on the west to the Eastern Ring-ditch on the east (illus 86). The artefactual evidence for the employment of a skilled land surveyor, with surveyor's staff, is of particular interest (Hope-Taylor 1977, 67-9, 141, 200-3). The placing of the surveyor's body and his instrument in a grave close to the leading alignment poses an interesting question. Was

he buried there, in a place of honour, after a natural death? Or was he deliberately sacrificed in order to preserve the secret of his craft and of the alignment? In that respect, it is noteworthy that the layout of the final A3 group of halls was only roughly in line with A2 and A4.

Buildings A2 and A4 have so much in common in overall plan, internal layout, and structural methods as to suggest that they are both works of one reign, probably Edwin's. This view was not held by Hope-Taylor, who pushed A2 (and with it the assembly grandstand) back to the reign of Edwin's predecessor, king Æthelfrith. This, however, seems to underestimate the close similarities between A2 and A4. Moreover, it takes no account of the change of the Northumbrian dynasty from Bernician Æthelfrith to Deiran Edwin.

If the burning which ended hall A4 did indeed occur in the time of troubles which included the successive slayings of Edwin, Osric and Eanfrid, then it was also the prelude to another change of dynasty in the person of Bernician Oswald. Did this in turn give rise to the change in hall-plans and building methods, datable on the evidence of a copy of a Merovingian coin to the 630s or later? We could more readily answer this question if we knew what kind of buildings Oswald had encountered during his exile in Iona. We do not, so the suggestion must remain speculative.

What is not in doubt is that the builders of the A3 halls attempted, in a rough and ready way, to place A3(a) on top of A4, and A1(b) on top of A1(a). Was this a symbolic statement of triumph on the part of the Bernicians? If so, then we can see a comparable statement of victory at Doon Hill where, after the British hall had been destroyed by fire, an Anglian/Bernician hall was fitted closely over its ruins? Again, the interpretation as a symbolic statement of victory is speculative, but the observed evidence is not in doubt. And if the interpretation is correct, then it provides a valuable insight into the mentality of warrior society.

### 15.2.5 Some socio-economic enigmas

We have noted above that, among the Britons, the Picts and the Dál Riata Scots, excavations on their fortified seats of power have normally yielded not only high-status metalwork, but also industrial debris such as moulds and crucibles. Examples are Dunadd, Dundurn, Dunollie and (with some reservations about its status), Mote of Mark. Among the northern Angles similar discoveries have been made in the excavation of the suburbs of Ecgrith's town (*urbs*) of Dunbar, including debris from smithies, and a fragment of a garnet-and-gold pectoral cross (Perry 2000, 113-4 and cover illus).

Even richer evidence of high-status metalwork comes from large-scale excavations at Flixborough, in the sub-kingdom of Lindsey, the southern neighbour of Northumbria (Loveluck 1997, 8-9). The site has been described as an 'aristocratic manorial centre', on the basis of up to seven large domestic buildings as much as 20m (65ft) in length: smaller, that is, than halls A2 and A4 at Yeavering, but larger than the lesser buildings at that site. Metalwork includes a large filigree gold ring, and many silver and gilded copper-alloy brooches and pins. Further evidence of richness is provided by Continental pottery and glass vessels.

In terms of artefacts and activities, the contrast between Flixborough and Yeavering could hardly be more pronounced. Of high-status metalwork, Yeavering has yielded a silver-inlaid iron buckle-loop, and a gold filigree ring, plus a gold-washed copper-alloy

coin (Hope-Taylor 1977, Chap IV). Apart from these, there is an undistinguished inventory of iron objects, chiefly nails, together with a few knives and belt- and harness-fittings. There is also a small quantity of pottery, mostly considered to be earlier than the 7th century (Hope-Taylor 1977, 170-81). No industrial activity is reported in the excavation monograph. The excavator, indeed, remarks on the scarcity and poor quality of most of the finds (*ibid*, 199).

In view of the rarity of occupation material from the larger halls, Hope-Taylor tentatively suggested (1977, 279) that this was the result of careful sweeping. This would certainly be an acceptable explanation if, as may be assumed, the halls had wooden floors. Moreover, the absence of evidence for metalworking may be because such noxious activities were located at a distance from the major buildings. It is worth noting that there are large spaces between the excavated areas, especially to the south of the main range of buildings, as is clearly shown on the general plan of the excavations (*ibid*, fig 12, facing p 46).



If we turn now to wider comparisons among Anglian royal centres, Bede and Eddius appear to suggest a hierarchy, from *civitas*, sometimes interchangeable with *urbs*, to *villa* or *vicus*. But the addition of *regis/regia* still marks a status considerably higher than that of plain *vicus*. Architecturally, that difference may be demonstrated as between the massively built great halls of Yeavinger (with all the effort implied in the felling, shaping and erecting of timbers), and the comparatively much slighter peasant houses at Thirlings (below, 16.2.2). Moreover, as the excavations at Dunbar have shown, the structures in the suburbs of an *urbs regis* may be quite lightly built compared with any of Yeavinger's array.

Another enigma posed by Yeavinger, this time an economic one, emerges when we consider the role of royal centres in the gathering, storing and consumption of food-renders and other tribute, including the fruits of predation. Hope-Taylor himself suggested that the great enclosure was a 'cattle corral for the reception of dues or taxes customarily paid in four-hoofed kind' (1977, 280). This is acceptable as far as it goes, but could hardly be applied to the extensive double enclosure of Milfield. Moreover, the reference to cattle alone underestimates the full range of food-stuffs required to support the whole system of heroic kingship.

Even in an Heroic Age, a king did not live solely on mead and the blood of battles. He and his war band needed the support of weapon-smiths, harness-makers, farriers, grooms, as well as retainers for tasks of a more domestic kind. His queen and family likewise needed a host of household servants, as well as weavers and tailors, brewers and bakers. Even if the warband slept in the hall (as the *Beowulf* poem suggests), and the smith at his forge, the baker at his oven, some accommodation would be needed both for the tasks and the doers of the tasks. Moreover, expanding on Hope-Taylor's comment, the hall was the focal point both of an agricultural estate—the royal demesne—and also of a region paying dues in kind to support the whole paraphernalia of heroic kingship. Those dues included grain and flour; fresh, dried and smoked meats; butter and cheese and honey; barrels of ale. All these needed carrying and storing, so we should also be looking for archaeological evidence for stabling for horses, sheds for carts, and granaries and other stores.

To specify more precisely: there was an evident need for substantial buildings, with walls buttressed to take a heavy floor loading, and perhaps also a loft. It should be remembered that the largest secular timber building in a high medieval English village was likely to have been the tithe barn: successor to the postulated granaries and stores of an Early Historic royal *villa*. The buttressed buildings known from the air at Milfield and Sprouston, and the excavated A group at Yeavinger, would readily serve such needs. Following such a line of thought, the palisaded enclosures attached to buildings A2, A4/A1(a), and A3/A1(b) and (c) could well have been stock-yards. But where then would we find the feasting hall and the women's sleeping quarters? Perhaps among the larger buildings of the C and D groups, which include sizable domestic buildings, D1 and D2, contemporary with the first stage of that highly significant structure, the assembly stand. The enigma remains: the discussion has hardly begun (for a preliminary essay, Alcock 1988a; 1988b).

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## THE DIVERSITY OF BUILDINGS

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTORY

**T**he very scale and complexity of the Yeavinger group of buildings, no less than the sustained and meticulous excavation of Yeavinger itself, has required an appropriately lengthy presentation. We must now turn to the diversity of buildings which proliferated at various social levels below that of kings. It would not be possible here to give a comprehensive account of such buildings from the River Tees to the Pentland Firth. What is attempted, however, is to display a wide miscellany of plans of representative settlements and dwellings.

It may seem no more than a truism to say that the great variety of dwellings recorded in northern Britain in the Early Historic centuries may be classified in two groups: those with circular plans, and those with rectangular ones. No great subtlety is introduced by qualifying this division to the extent that the rectangular merges into the sub-rectangular, and the truly circular stands beside the oval and the irregularly curvilinear, so that we are actually looking at a graduation between two clear extremes.

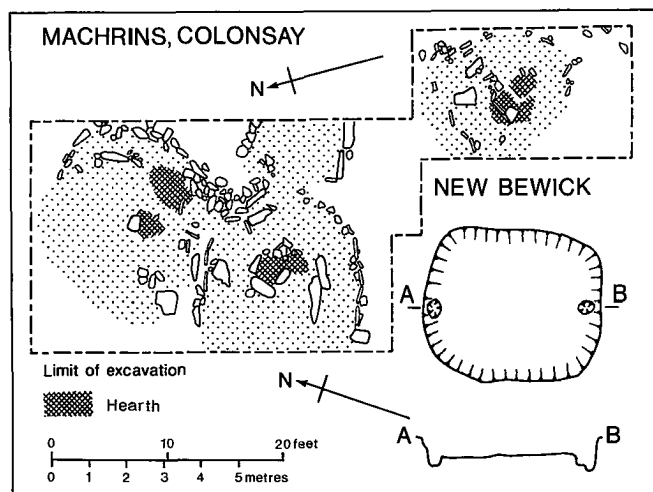
The distinction, however, is not merely a geometric formality: it may reflect the building traditions of nations or peoples—that is, of Bede's *gentes*. At the most obvious, we can say that the Angles lived in rectangular or sub-rectangular dwellings, the Dál Riata Scots in circular ones. Both forms might be found among the Britons, but the Picts—about whose dwellings we know very little—on the whole favoured circular forms. It will be convenient to arrange this account primarily in relation to the plans—rectangular or circular—rather than the peoples.

### 16.2 RECTANGULAR AND SUB-RECTANGULAR BUILDINGS IN ANGLIAN AREAS

#### 16.1 Anglo-Saxon type sunken buildings

To begin, then, with the lowliest class of sub-rectangular buildings—used as it happens by the Anglo-Saxons. These take the form of a pit, normally dug into well-drained gravel: flat-bottomed, sub-rectangular in plan, typically 4-6m (13-20ft) long, 3-4.5m (10-15ft) wide and up to 0.5m (1ft 8in) deep. Normally there are one (or sometimes three) post-holes at either end of the long axis (illus 90).

Because they are a continental, as well as an English type of dwelling, it is convenient to use the German term *Grubenhäuser* for them (Rahtz 1976). In English they are frequently referred to as 'sunken-floored buildings'. In Slav lands, they may occur as the only type of building in large villages in semi-defensive positions. The reason for sinking these Slavic dwellings into the ground is to give protection against the winds and winter cold of the European plain. Because they are easy to detect, for instance in gravel



90  
Plans of New  
Bewick and  
Machrins.

trial or craft purposes, their interiors largely filled by ovens or looms. In some cases, the pit may have been covered by a floor at the exterior ground level, so that it functioned as a cellar or underground store in a manner comparable with the souterrains of Angus (below, 16.4.3). Others may have been the hovels of slaves, while a few even overlap in floor area the smallest of the (supposedly) socially superior ground-level buildings. It is necessary here to refute the view, strongly expressed on the evidence of early excavations at Sutton Courtenay, that the inhabitants of sunken-floored dwellings lived 'amid a filthy litter of broken bones'—including a complete ox-skull—of food and shattered pottery', and even a human burial beneath a thick covering of clay (Leeds 1936, 25-6). Such evidence of squalor has not been matched in other excavations; and it seems likely that the Sutton Courtenay examples were in fact abandoned dwellings which had subsequently been used as rubbish pits. It is greatly to be regretted that the 'squalid' image of the Anglo-Saxon peasant should still be promoted in the 1990s (Frantzen 1992, 27).

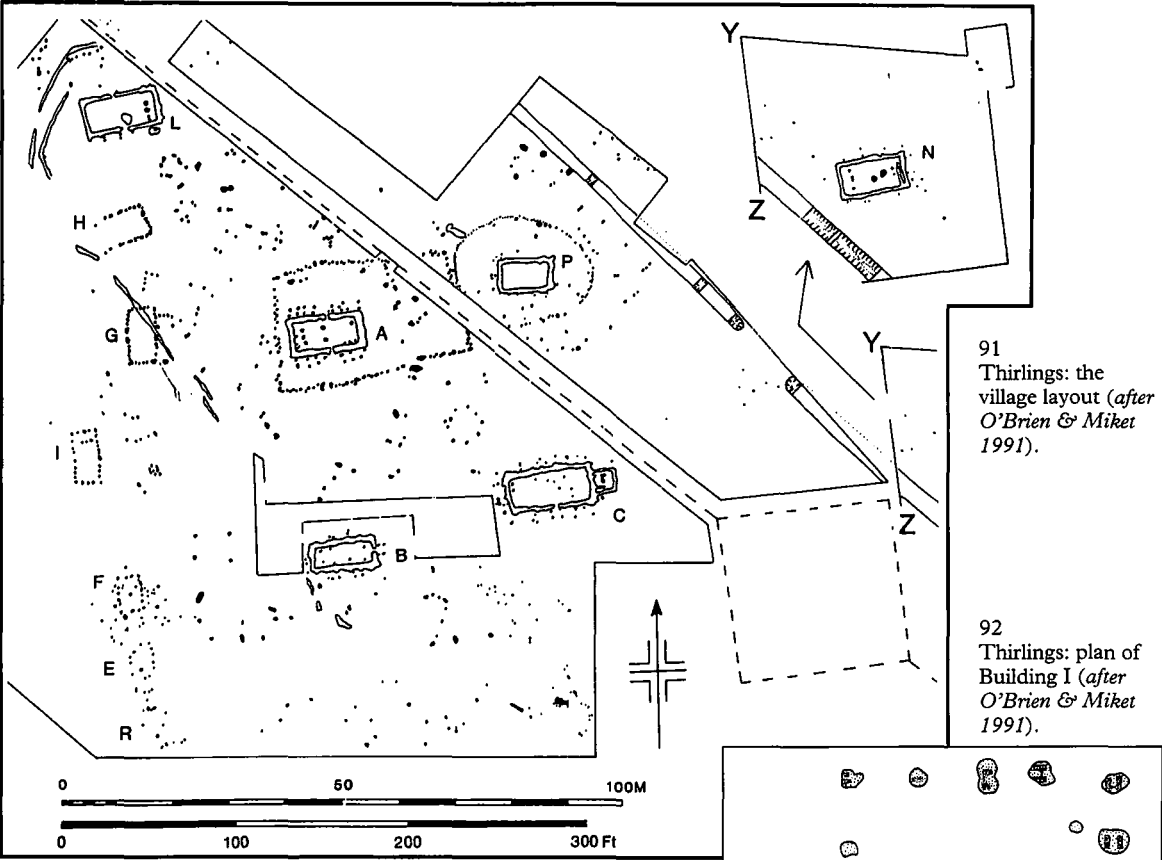
As for their distribution in Bernicia: the most northerly example to have been reported in an interim report appears to have been at Ratho in Lothian (DES 1993, 59-61). On the floor were many clay loom-weights, suggesting that this had been a weaver's hut. Further south, another weaver's hut has been proved by excavation at New Bewick in the valley of the river Till, which drains northward into the Tweed (Gates & O'Brien 1988, 5-9; here illus 90). Others have been claimed at Sprouston in the Tweed valley (Smith 1991), or even as far north as the Carse of Gowrie in south-east Perthshire, but these have still to be tested by excavation (RCAHMS 1994).

### 16.2.2 Rectangular surface structures: the Thirlings sequence

Some rectangular timber buildings at ground level, sometimes set among scattered *Grubenhäuser* (West *et al* 1985), may be seen as the homesteads of the peasant farmers who formed the backbone of early Anglo-Saxon society and its farming economy (Loyn 1991, espec chap 4). The best-known example of such a settlement in Bernicia is at Thirlings, Northumberland, in the Till valley (O'Brien & Miket 1991: the account given here differs in some details from that of the excavators). There, crop-mark indications have been systematically excavated to reveal a dozen buildings, which may be divided into two classes on both structural and distributional grounds (illus 91). The important structural difference is between those which have their walls set in continuous trenches

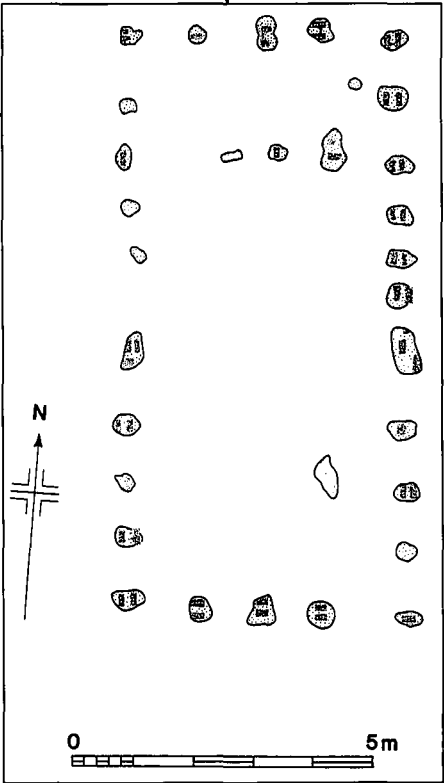
pits, it was formerly believed that among the Anglo-Saxons too they were the only type of peasant house. In Germanic areas, however, it was realized that it was unusual to find them as the only type in a village: more normally they were set among ground-level rectangular houses. (For accessible continental examples, Chapelot & Fossier 1985; Fehring 1991; Gojda 1991; Vána 1983). This is now recognized as the norm in Anglo-Saxon England as well, though sometimes the *Grubenhäuser* may be placed apart from the ground-level buildings, rather than among them.

The functions of *Grubenhäuser* seem to have been various. Some were for indus-



and those with the uprights bedded in individual post-pits. At Yeavinger, clear intersections show that the continuous wall-trench of Yeavinger building A5 obliterated parts of the post-pit buildings A6 and A7 (Hope-Taylor 1977). This stratigraphically-derived sequence may be applied to Thirlings as well.

There, the post-pit buildings (illus 92, Building I) lie in a N-S row on the western edge of the village, somewhat apart from the E-W orientated post-in-trench buildings which form the core of the village. If the latter are correctly dated to the mid-6th century AD, and attributed to the time of the original acquisition of Bamburgh under king Ida, and the expansion thence into the Till basin, then the post-pit buildings might constitute a pre-Anglian, and therefore British village of the early 6th century or earlier. This consisted of at least six buildings, along a N-S street running for at least 100m (110yds). If this interpretation is accepted, then it would provide a model for the early medieval British nucleated bond-hamlet. That such settlements might be nucleated may be inferred from the Welsh law-tracts, which specify the penalties incurred when a fire spreads from one



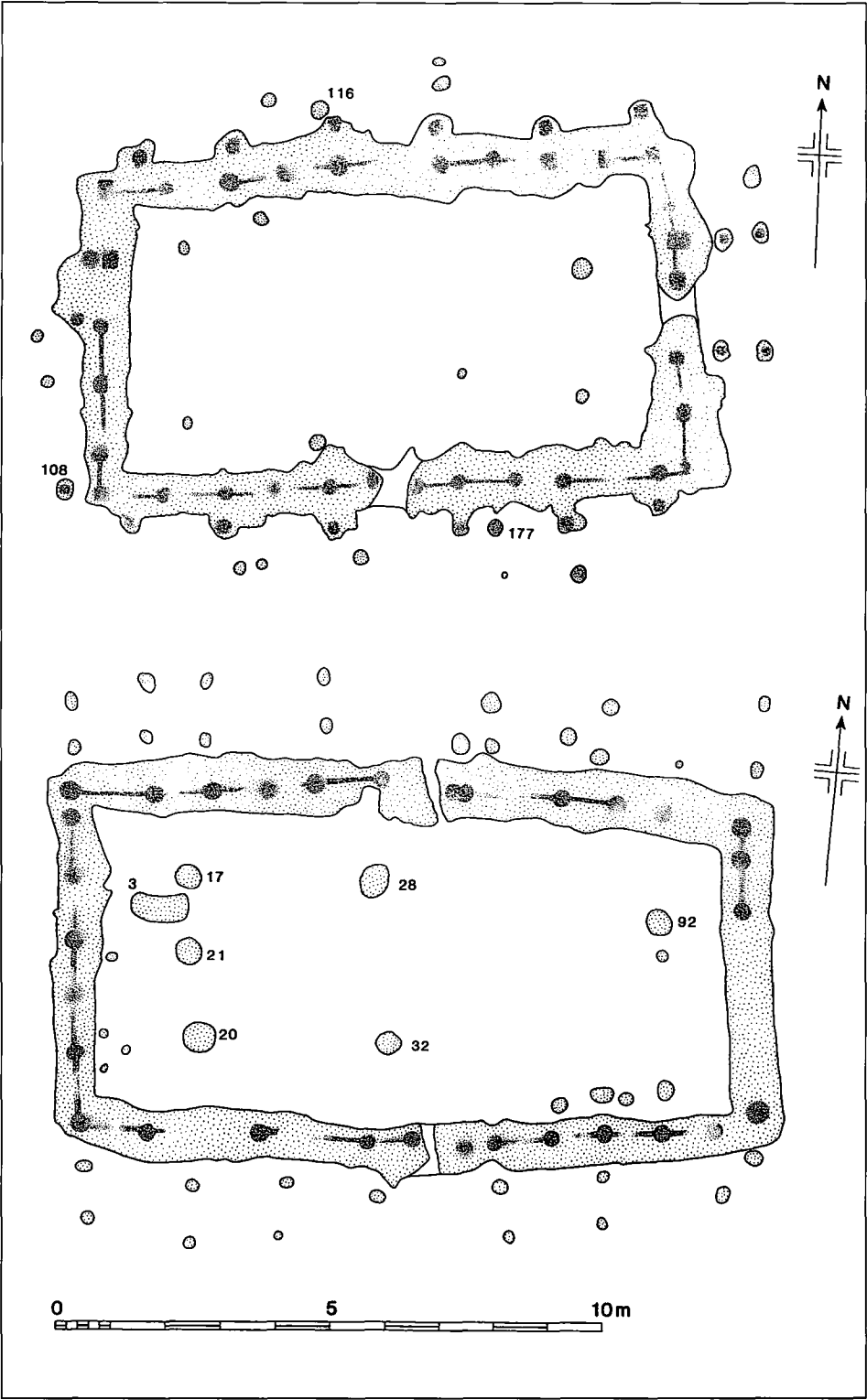
burning house to its neighbours, which obviously could not occur in a dispersed settlement (Jenkins 1986, 169-70). Among the individual house plans at Thirlings, Building I is particularly interesting because it has a separate chamber partitioned off at one end.

At Yeavinger, two (possibly three) small and rather simple rectangular structures are assigned to post-Roman phase I. Like the earlier buildings at Thirlings, Yeavinger A6 and A7 (and A8?) are built of separate posts (Hope-Taylor 1977, 63). Except that they underlie all other buildings, there is no direct evidence for their date. If indeed they are earlier than the Anglian settlement of the Yeavinger area, it is a matter of considerable interest that they lie at the very core of the major group of Anglian buildings, with their major axes on the same alignment. This may imply a strong British influence on the subsequent Anglian pattern of Yeavinger.

Returning to Thirlings: the presumed later group of buildings, those with walls raised in continuous trenches, consists of six buildings, all aligned with their long axes E-W, and spread rather haphazardly over an area of 170m (185yds) E-W by 95m (105yds) N-S. Radiocarbon age-estimates suggest that they were built over a period of several decades in the mid- and later 6th century and into the 7th. In so far as historical correlations may be suggested, this would be the period from AD 547 when, according to Northumbrian tradition, Ida began to reign at Bamburgh. This suggestion is not without controversy. It has been considered that Ida himself had been unable to expand inland from his supposed pirates' nest at Bamburgh; and that such expansion did not occur until the reign of Aethelfrith, late in the 6th century. But Ida belonged to the third generation of his family in Britain; he was established, not in a pirates' nest, but in a formidable natural stronghold which became the principal royal centre of Bernicia; and it is difficult to believe that he had been pinned down there, unable to move a mere 15 miles inland across terrain with no significant intervening barrier. In short, there is no reasonable obstacle to the view that the Angles were at Thirlings in Ida's reign in the mid-6th century.

From the radiocarbon age-estimates, buildings A and B appear to be the latest in the Thirlings sequence (illus 93 A & B). They were constructed of posts 30cm (12in) or more in diameter, set about 0.95m (3ft) apart in a trench which may have been 1m (3ft 3in) or more deep. Stains in the soil suggest that between each pair of uprights was set a cill beam, which may have supported a wattle-and-daub wall, or more probably one of upright staves. The actual construction cannot be verified from the soil stains alone, and the interpretation offered here is based on a classic German example where the lower part of the wall had been preserved by water-logging (Der Husterknupp, Lower Rhine: Herrnbrodt 1958). At Thirlings, in buildings A, B and C (and perhaps others as well), a row of buttresses or props was set closely along the walls to support the roof, or perhaps a storage-loft, while another row of posts, further from the wall, may have formed a verandah for storage.

The wall construction of the other trench-built buildings at Thirlings is more difficult to understand, but it seems to have been based on a single, or more usually a double, row of vertical planks or beams, of varied thickness and variously arranged. In floor area the buildings range from 38m<sup>2</sup> to 90m<sup>2</sup> (410ft<sup>2</sup> to 970ft<sup>2</sup>) plus an annexe of 9m<sup>2</sup> (97ft<sup>2</sup>). Finally, in this brief summary, we should notice that building A is set within an oblong fence, and P within an oval one, presumably marking small stockyards or garden-plots. Altogether, this peasant village shows a fascinating combination of uniformity and variety. Moreover, aerial photographs, unconfirmed by excavation, hint that the settle-



93  
Thirlings: plans of  
Buildings A & B  
(after O'Brien &  
Miket 1991)

ment may have been both more extensive and more complex than this account suggests. Both to north and south there appear to have been satellite settlements of *Grubenhäuser*.

### 16.3 NON-ANGLIAN RECTANGULAR AND SUB-RECTANGULAR BUILDINGS

#### 16.3.1 Roman period survivals

We must now examine the evidence for rectangular timber buildings in non-Anglian and pre-Anglian—that is to say Brittonic—contexts. During the Roman occupation of Britain, rectangular buildings, whether of masonry or wood, had become common in the more romanised southern parts of the island. Among the Britons of the frontier zones, both west and north, rectilinear banks sometimes enclosed groups of round-houses; and more rarely some of the houses were themselves rectangular or sub-rectangular. Those that have been discovered are mostly built of dry stone; but occasionally excavation has recovered rectangular structures of wooden posts. Since these are not apparent on the ground, it may be that many more await discovery by excavation (classic accounts in Jobey 1960; Hogg 1963).

Some of these Roman-period settlements lasted into the 5th century. More surprising is the case of Birdoswald, because it was based on a Roman fort. It appears that a sequence of timber halls was built on the ruins of the fort granary, beginning in the late Roman period but probably continuing into the post-Roman period. One of these halls appears to have been post-built, 23m (75ft) long by 12m (40ft) wide (Frere 1988, 436-7; Wilmott 1989). This building, essentially sub-Roman in character, may have been the forerunner of some of the post-built structures already described.

#### 16.3.2 Rectangular buildings at Sprouston, Doon Hill and Cruggleton

A rectangular building of more certainly British affiliation has been recognized on the Sprouston air photographs (Smith 1991, 266-9). This building, of distinctive plan, has its main axis deliberately aligned on a burial enclosed in a ring-ditch, itself a common early medieval type. The building itself has rightly been compared with Doon Hill A (illus 85), but the equally compelling parallel with the late 5th-/early 6th-century hall at Cadbury Castle, Somerset, has hitherto been overlooked (Alcock 1995, illus 11.3). The distinctive features of all three are: parallel long walls; gently curved gables (so-called 'open-book' gables); and an internal division one-third of the way along in one structural phase (Doon Hill A and Sprouston have at least one other internal phase).

Because Sprouston is known only from air photographs, there is no evidence for its date. Doon Hill A, however, was burned down, and an Anglian hall in a late Yeavinger-style, Doon Hill B, was built over it, probably in the middle third of the 7th century. The Cadbury hall is dated by imported pottery and glass to the late 5th and 6th centuries. One of the most interesting aspects of this group of British halls is their relative sizes in relation to the enclosing works. Sprouston, the smallest, has no defence or enclosure. Doon Hill A is enclosed merely by a single palisade. Finally, the middle-sized hall at Cadbury Castle was on the central axis of a major early medieval hillfort.

The Doon Hill A hall may be compared in size with the middle-range halls at Yeavinger, such as C4. The hall itself occupies barely one tenth of the palisaded enclosure, and,

despite the near-total exploration of the interior, no other substantial building traces were recovered. If, as seems possible, Doon Hill was a lesser royal centre, visited periodically by the royal court and followers on a progress or circuit, then the majority of the court must have been accommodated in very temporary wicker structures, or even leather tents.

For a rather later example of an early medieval post-built rectangular structure, we may turn to Cruggleton, Wigtownshire (illus 53). This is on a precipitous headland which was later occupied by a masonry castle. An early phase, however, was defended by a palisade, and within this was an oblong building 6m by 3.7m (20 by 12ft), or about 22m<sup>2</sup> (237ft<sup>2</sup>) (illus 54). This was defined by four large posts along each side, and gable-end posts to support the ridge. The interior was divided in the proportions 1:2 by a screen; and from the burning down of this came charcoal for a calibrated date of AD 650–980. Arguably the region might still have been in British (or even Irish?) hands in AD 650, but the probability is very high that this defended building, which might be classed as a small hall, was an Anglian construction (Ewart 1985).

In the extreme north of mainland Britain, and also in Orkney, is another group of parallel-sided buildings with curved gables. These are sometimes known locally as ‘wags’, a corruption of a Gaelic word for a cave. They are normally part of more complex dry-stone buildings with a long structural history, which is difficult to disentangle. Typically the wags are 14m (45ft) long by 5m (16ft) wide, and the interior is divided into several open compartments by upright slabs (Foster 1992, fig 42). There has been some controversy over their date (contrast MacKie 1971, 16, with A Ritchie 1975, 32); but more recent excavation of a site at Howe, Stromness, Orkney has placed a wag-like building firmly in the Late Atlantic Iron Age, probably before AD 650 (Ballin Smith (ed) 1994, 116).

### 16.3.3 ‘Pitcarmick-type’ buildings

In the last decade, a new class of subrectangular buildings has been discovered, initially on the uplands of northern Perthshire (RCAHMS 1990, 12-3). These have been designated ‘Pitcarmick-type’ buildings, after the area of initial discovery above Strathardle, in the heart of Pictish territory. They are classed as sub-rectangular because, while the long side is more or less straight, the short ends are normally markedly curved. The walls appear as low earthen banks, with rather haphazard stones. As the plans show, the buildings may occur as singletons, pairs (with one normally larger), and with porches, annexes and yards or folds. There is a single entrance in one long side (illus 94).

As yet, little information is available from excavation. It appears that the long walls may be of clay or turf. In one case where the building-stance had been levelled-off into a slope, the upper side appears to have been of wood set in a continuous trench. The curved ends may be wholly of stone. One half of the floor may be lower than the other, while the upper end has a stone-built hearth (Barrett *et al* forthcoming).

By the late 1980s, at least 48 of such distinctive buildings had been discovered in north-east Perthshire. More recently, examination of cropmarks in south-east Perthshire has found no obvious traces of Pitcarmick-type buildings there (RCAHMS 1994, 75). Subsequent fieldwork, especially above Strathbraan, has, however, extended the distribution more widely to the west (Cowley 1997).

Despite the scantiness of the available evidence, this very distinctive group of buildings deserves at least some tentative attempt to provide a context. Radiocarbon dates suggest

94

Typical

'Pitcarmick' plans:

a) 303.2 Pitcarmick

(North); b) 253

Dalnaglar; c) 302.6

Pitcarmick (West);

288.2, 288.4

Knockali; 302.4

Pitcarmick (West);

305.4 Pitcarmick

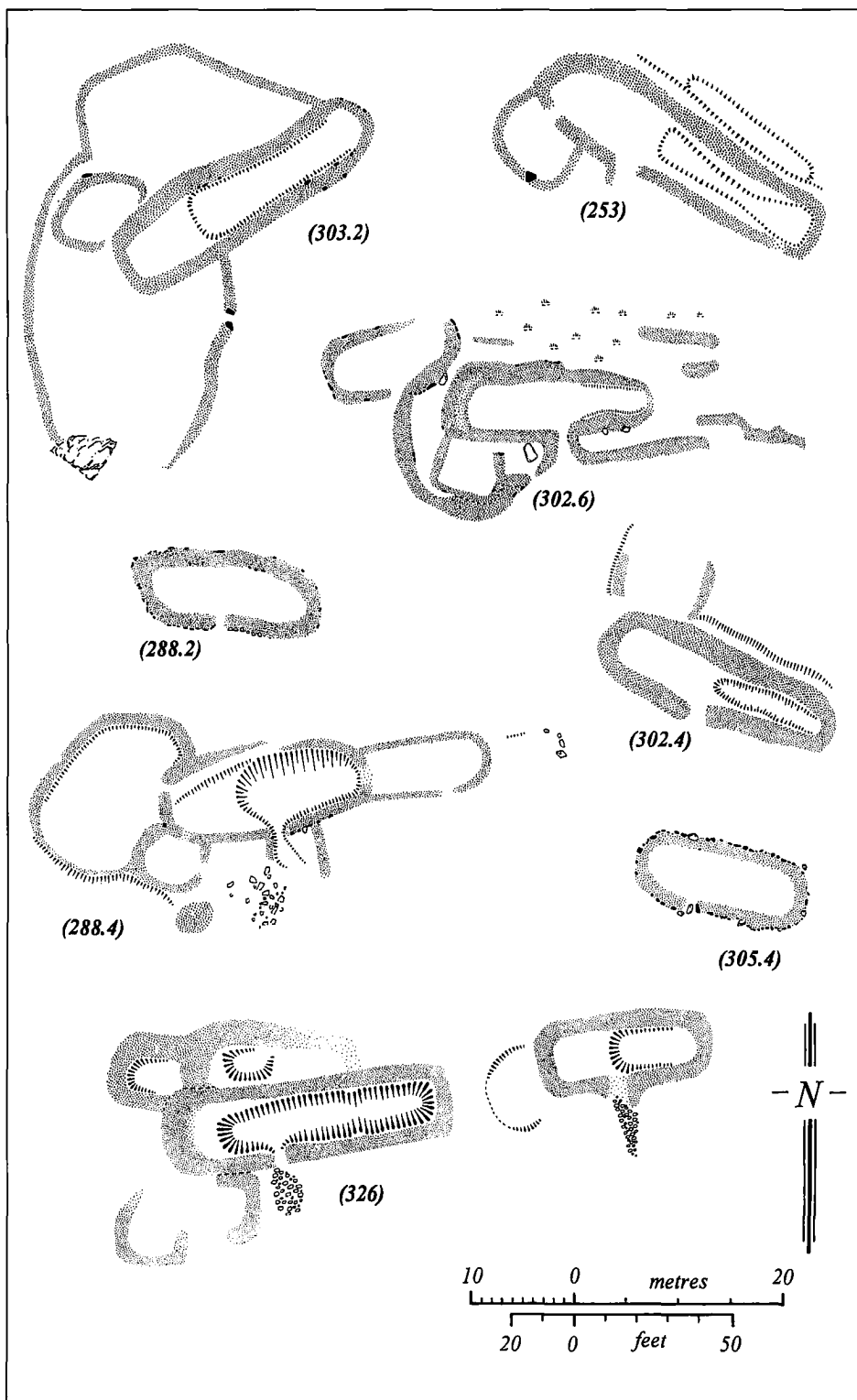
(East); 326 Welton

of Creuchies (*after**RCAHMS* 1990,

156, 109, 155, 148,

149, 155, 156,

170).



the 8th-9th centuries for the beginnings of the type: that is to say, late Pictish. The close contouring of the maps in the Strathbraan survey emphasizes the limited altitudinal range of the distribution: rarely below 300m (985ft) or above 330m (1080ft) (Cowley 1997, illus 2, 8, 9 & 10). This seems to rule out use as permanent farmsteads, and suggests rather that they were an early form of shielings, for herds-men and -women tending the cattle on the summer pastures.

## 16.4 CIRCULAR AND CURVILINEAR PLANS

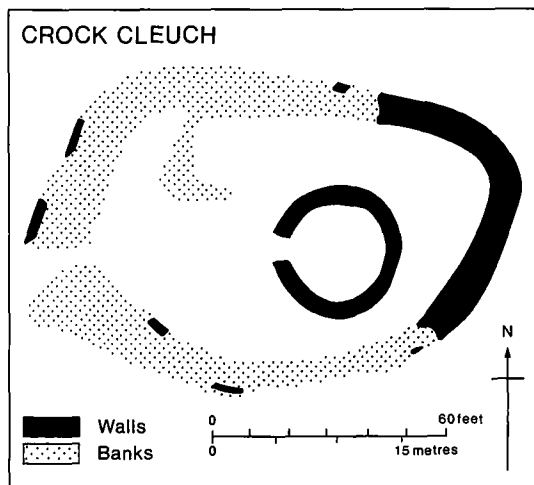
### 16.4.1 British areas

The second main category of buildings comprises circular, oval or more or less curvilinear plans. So far as the Britons are concerned, the most abundant evidence comes from north-east England and south-east Scotland, the territory of the Votadini, or as they came to be known in the Old Welsh of the early middle ages, the Gododdin. Back into the Bronze Age, in the mid-2nd millennium BC, these people had lived in circular houses, with walls of wood, or rubble and earth, typically enclosing floors between 4.5m (15ft) and 7.5m (25ft) in diameter. If this is expressed in terms of floor area, we get a better concept of the size range: 16-45m<sup>2</sup> (170ft<sup>2</sup> to 485ft<sup>2</sup>).

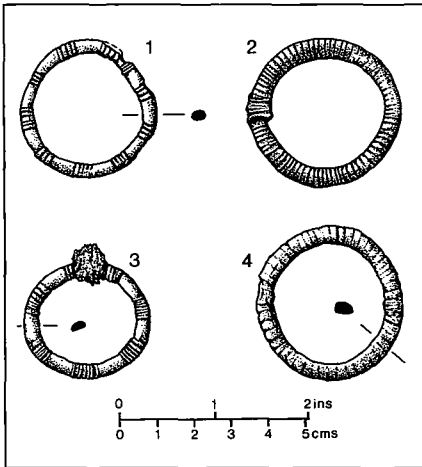
In the Bronze Age, these houses were normally in open settlements; but in the Pre-Roman Iron Age, from about 750 BC, they were frequently enclosed within fences, stone farmyard walls, or even regular hillforts. Some enclosures contained a large central house plus one or two smaller subsidiary buildings, suggesting a higher status than those with a number of equal-sized buildings. That these types of dwelling and settlement continued into the Roman Iron Age is demonstrated by the occurrence of Roman trinkets and scraps of Roman pottery. Since these include coarse wares, they can be considered as true chronological markers, unlike the supposedly 'reliquary' material in the Argyll duns. In the hillforts, stone-built huts often overlie derelict defences, and this has been considered to mark a period of Roman-enforced peace (for an introduction to this vast topic see Jobey 1966; 1985).

Given the abundance of such settlements up to the 4th century AD, it is natural to think that they would have continued to be occupied, and even newly built, until they were replaced by Anglian house- and settlement-forms in the later 6th and 7th centuries. It is, however, difficult to find hard evidence for such continuity after the supply of readily recognisable and datable Roman objects had ceased. The best evidence comes from two walled farmsteads at Crock Cleuch in Roxburghshire (Steer & Keeney 1947; here, illus 95), for in addition to 'native', or so-called 'Anglo-British' pottery, one of these produced a bronze annular brooch, with a narrow oval cross-section and bunches of mouldings on the loop. This is an Anglo-Saxon type, with close parallels in the Norton, Cleveland cemetery (Sherlock & Welch 1992), for instance in graves 9, 11, 44 and 112 (illus 94). Another such bronze annular brooch occurs in a British context at the Buiston crannog (Munro 1882, fig 241; here illus 96), with parallels in Norton graves 23 and 112.

95  
Crock Cleuch: plan  
of one of two  
walled farmsteads.



That the post-Roman dating of Crock Cleuch turns on a single object argues that other such enclosed settlements of round-houses may likewise have been occupied in early medieval times, even though they have yielded only 'native' pottery. (It should be mentioned here that the pottery recovered from the Anglian village of Thirlings was also of the 'Anglo-British' type). Each of the Crock Cleuch farmsteads contains one large circular or slightly oval house, respectively about 540 and 645ft<sup>2</sup>, 50 and 60m<sup>2</sup> in floor area; and there is room for other smaller buildings within the enclosures.



96 Annular brooches from Crock Cleuch (1); Buiston, Ayr, (2) and Norton, Cleveland (3 & 4).

The field work of Jobey and others shows that settlements similar to those of the Votadini extended westward into the headwaters of the Clyde and of rivers flowing into the Solway: the lands of the Selgovae and probably the Novantae as well (Jobey 1985). In default of excavation, however, the dating of these settlements is unknown.

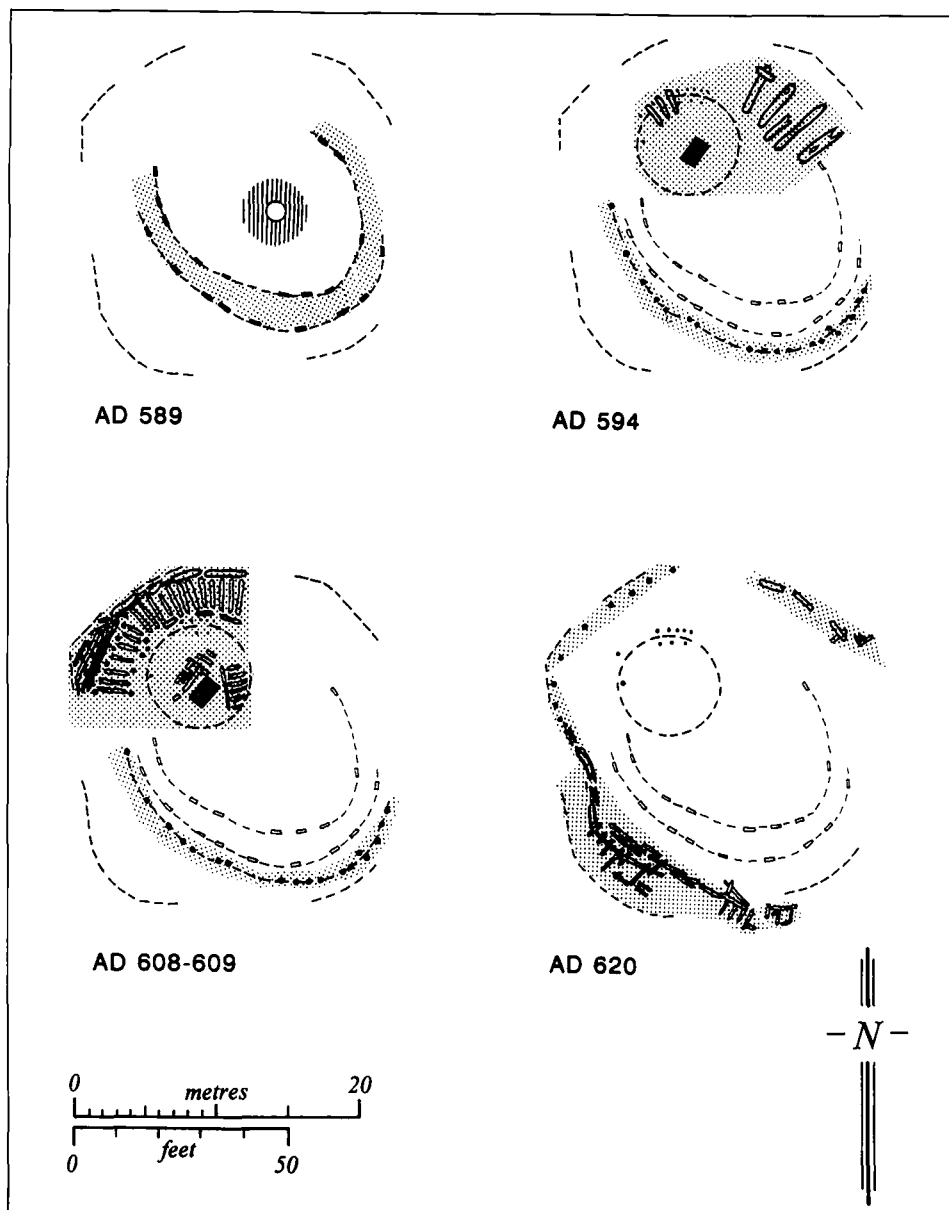
The most striking evidence for the strength of the round-house tradition among the Britons comes from the excavation of a substantial site at Buiston, some 12km (7.5 miles) inland from

the Ayrshire coast. Here, a crannog or artificial island had been built in a shallow lake, with a dug-out canoe moored nearby. The site was dug into briefly in 1880-81, by the excavation methods of the time (Munro 1882); and again in 1989-90, by rigorous methods which devoted appropriate attention to environmental evidence as well as to structures and portable artefacts. Unfortunately, much of the crannog structure had perished in the intervening decades, but it was still possible to establish five major phases of construction (Crone 1999). Here only a simplified account, focused on the Early Historic crannog, is possible, and the very frequent minor modifications are necessarily omitted (illus 97).

The earliest phase saw the building-up, in a shallow lake, of an artificial mound, 1.1m (3.6ft) high and with a minimum diameter of 16.5m (54ft). The body of the mound consisted of substantial boulders and timbers (some of them worked), as well as brushwood and turves. It is possible that the perimeter of the mound had been retained with stakes. Subsequently, an irregular polygonal circuit of small stakes, with a maximum dimension of 25m (82ft), was erected, probably to support the levelling of the mound.

Phase III saw the earliest trace of a habitable structure: House A (illus 98), a round-house *c* 5.6m (18ft) in diameter, datable *c* AD 589. This had a central hearth. The flooring consisted variously of brushwood, clay and cobbles, frequently relaid. The house was sited, slightly off-centre, within an oval enclosure *c* 144m<sup>2</sup> (1550ft<sup>2</sup>) in area, formed by a double palisade (illus 97 and 98, F95 & 96). It is considered that the intention of the double palisade was not merely to contain the mound, but that it had a definite defensive function.

From the dendrochronological evidence, it appears that House A, despite the frequency with which its flooring was relaid, lasted for only about five years. In Phase IV (AD 594), it was replaced by the larger House B, set towards the NW perimeter of the enclosure. The house was apparently 8.0m (26ft) in diameter, to judge from a double arc of stakes and woven wickerwork which is interpreted as the wall. There was a near-central hearth,



97  
Buiston crannog:  
four phase plans  
(after Lorraine  
McEwan).

which underwent four building sub-phases, in one of which it was constructed of large stone slabs. The floor was made variously of brushwood, clay and laid planking. There were also internal partitions, presumably defining the division of space for specific functions such as sleeping, cooking, and other indoor activities.

House B was initially enclosed by a new palisade, F93, erected more or less concentrically with palisades F95 and F96, and supported with radial baulks of oak. Within some 15 years, this was massively remodelled in Phase V (illus 97: AD 608-609). The new defence, F412, was a wooden framework consisting of two concentric palisades of squared oaks, joined radially with morticed planks. The space between the two palisades

98

Buiston crannog:  
detailed plans of  
palisades (after  
*Lorraine McEwan*).

was packed with timbers, both squared and unworked, to create an elevated walkway, probably with an external parapet.

Subsequently, the NW quadrant of the crannog underwent a massive slumping, which carried away part of House B and also of the palisaded walkway. The deep hollow which was thus created was then infilled with miscellaneous structural debris and also domestic rubbish: indeed 75% of stratified artefacts were recovered from the infill. Thereafter, there was a further strengthening of the perimeter with a ring-beam palisade, evident in the SW quadrant. This in turn was followed by a palisade of small stakes, F400 (illus 97). In the NE quadrant there was part of another circuit, F404, of uncertain phasing.

This account of the Early Historic phases at the Buiston crannog, simplified as it is, reveals an astounding complexity of building and rebuilding, occurring—on the dendrochronological evidence—over a time-span of about 45 years. Presumably a major factor which enforced the rebuildings was the inherent instability of the crannog-mound itself, so strongly demonstrated by the collapse of the NW quadrant in phase V. We can only speculate that the builders were influenced by a social need to add water defences

to those of timber (for crannogs as defensive structures, see 13.5).

Some further comments must be made about the small size of the two houses, as compared with the model inferred from the 19th-century excavations. Munro had speculated 'as to the kind of dwelling house... whether one large pagoda-like building or a series of small huts'. The evidence, though inconclusive 'appears to me to be indicative of the former' (Munro 1882, 205). This interpretation implied a circular, or more probably oval, building with diameters of 18.6m x 17m (61ft x 56ft) (quite close, that is, to the size of the Phase III defensive enclosure). The 'large-pagoda' interpretation has been widely accepted. The suggestion has even been made that Munro's oval plan was the product of slippage of timbers in the wet unstable ground of the mound; and that consequently, his plan could be rationalized into a double post-ring, with its outer wall about 16m (53 ft) in diameter (Alcock 1993, fig 12). If this interpretation had proved tenable, then it would have suggested interesting parallels with certain large roundhouses in the Pre-Roman Iron Age of southern Britain. But the full publication of the 1989-90 excavations at Buiston has totally falsified such a hypothesis.

Refuse was thrown into the lake. Among the rubbish there were high status finds, which included a pair of gold tress-rings, imported pottery, and glass vessels, as well as weapons such as a fine spear-head and cross-bow bolts, and also evidence of on-site metalworking. It is these finds which justify the description 'noble' for this household. There must have been cultivated lands across the lake, and domestic animals would have been kept there. It is likely that there had been a peasant settlement in the vicinity.

#### 16.4.2 Duns of the *Scotti*

In Dál Riata, the round-house tradition is represented in the archaeological evidence principally by the dun houses of Harding's classification: that is, those circular (or occasionally oval or oblong) duns small enough to have been roofed over (Harding 1984; for the chronology of duns see 13.2 above). The maximum diameter for such dun houses is set at about 15m (50ft). In the case of an oval or oblong dun, the area could, of course, be greater. Though no full statistics are readily available, the plans in the Royal Commission's Argyll *Inventories* show that a majority of duns have at least one dimension less than 15m (50ft); and indeed duns with circular (as opposed to more irregular) plans favour a diameter at, or a little less than, that figure.

This might lead to the conclusion that roofed, or house-duns, were the norm in Argyll. This is an oversimplification. For instance, the dun at Kildonan on the east coast of Kintyre has a heart-shaped plan with dimensions of 19.2m x 12.8m (63ft x 42ft), and could therefore have been roofed. Excavation showed, however, that the dun wall enclosed an open court with areas of paving, hearths and lean-to structures (Fairhurst 1939). Nevertheless, it can reasonably be suggested that many duns, especially the near-circular ones, are versions of the timber round-houses of Lowland Britain in an area where stone is the natural building material. In particular, there is a close correspondence in floor area, the most important measurement in assessing the potential number of occupants.

The social implications of this are profound. The published plans of duns tend to create a subjective impression of small but strong military structures, intended primarily for defence against hostile neighbouring clansmen. That impression is increased because the most photogenic duns are those on rocky knolls. It would be more reasonable to see

them as houses which had been strongly built, as much to resist a hostile climate as hostile neighbours; using readily available stone; and often perched on rocky outcrops in order to conserve precious tillable or grazeable land.

Moreover, at anything over 11m (36ft) diameter, they would indeed have been commodious by Iron Age and Early Historic standards. This point was demonstrated graphically by CR Musson in 1972, by placing the plan of a modern three-bedroomed bungalow with a floor area of 96m<sup>2</sup> (1025ft<sup>2</sup>) alongside Iron Age round-houses ranging in area up to about 178m<sup>2</sup>; the equivalent, that is, of a dun with an internal diameter of 15m (50ft) (Alcock 1972, 34-5 with fig 1; 1987a, fig 12.4). These might be seen as the homes of minor potentates with their immediate dependants; especially so if the dun-house had additional enclosing walls.

Without the substantial stone wall of a dun as a marker, it is only by the greatest good fortune that slighter traces of buildings have been recognised in open situations. Thus, in the sand dunes at Machrins on Colonsay a group of floors was discovered, demarcated by flimsy walls of upright stone slabs backed into the sand, and with associated hearths (JNG Ritchie 1981; illus 90). The plans are curvilinear rather than rectangular, and suggest areas of about 15m<sup>2</sup> (160ft<sup>2</sup>) that is, within the size-range of Germanic *Grubenhäuser*. The excavator has suggested a date of around AD 800 on the evidence of bronzes from a near-by burial; but the iron knives from the houses could as well be of the 5th to 7th centuries AD.

#### 16.4.3 Pictish structures: souterrains

Compared with the Angles, the Britons and the Scots, the Picts have featured little in this chapter. This is the more surprising because they occupied large areas of good farming land in eastern Scotland from Fife to the Moray Firth. While it is certain that their dwellings did not have the high visibility of the stone-built Dál Riata duns, it might have been expected that air photography would have proved as sensitive to Pictish settlement as it obviously is to that of the Angles.

In some respects, that expectation is correct. In recent decades, it has appeared that souterrains—that is, underground stone-built chambers—do show up well on air photographs (Maxwell 1987; RCAHMS 1994). Previously they had normally been discovered only by accident. Rare excavations suggest that the souterrains were principally structures of the Roman Iron Age, which were demolished in the 3rd or 4th centuries AD (Wainwright 1963). Occasionally traces of the floors, or even the lower walls, of ground-level structures were found beside the souterrain.

For instance, at Carlungie in Angus, two small pear-shaped structures, each about 12m<sup>2</sup> (130ft<sup>2</sup>) in area, had been built after the souterrain had been demolished. Moreover, while the souterrain had been open, the presence of contemporary buildings had been indicated by areas of paving. One of these had a plan in the shape of a figure eight—that is to say, two small circular rooms were joined by a doorway to give a total area of about 18m<sup>2</sup> (190ft<sup>2</sup>). On the excavator's interpretation—based, it must be stressed, on the slightest artefactual evidence—the souterrain had been demolished 'probably before AD 250', which should give a terminus for the eight-shaped structure (Wainwright 1963). But a very similar building at Birsay on Orkney has been quite firmly placed in the Pictish period there (A Ritchie 1985, pl 9.6). This may make it necessary to reconsider the Carlungie chronology. At least we may expect to find small stone-paved

dwelling with boulder footings for their walls scattered throughout eastern Scotland in the proto-Pictish and Pictish periods. This may also imply that some souterrains should be attributed to the later, rather than the earlier, period. It is therefore unfortunate that the air photographs provide no chronological signal.

Mention may also be made here of the occasional use of the thickness of the walls of duns to provide secure storage chambers, the above-ground equivalent of souterrains. There is a particularly good example of this at Dun Rostan in Mid-Argyll (RCAHMS 1988, 191-2: illus 57 here).

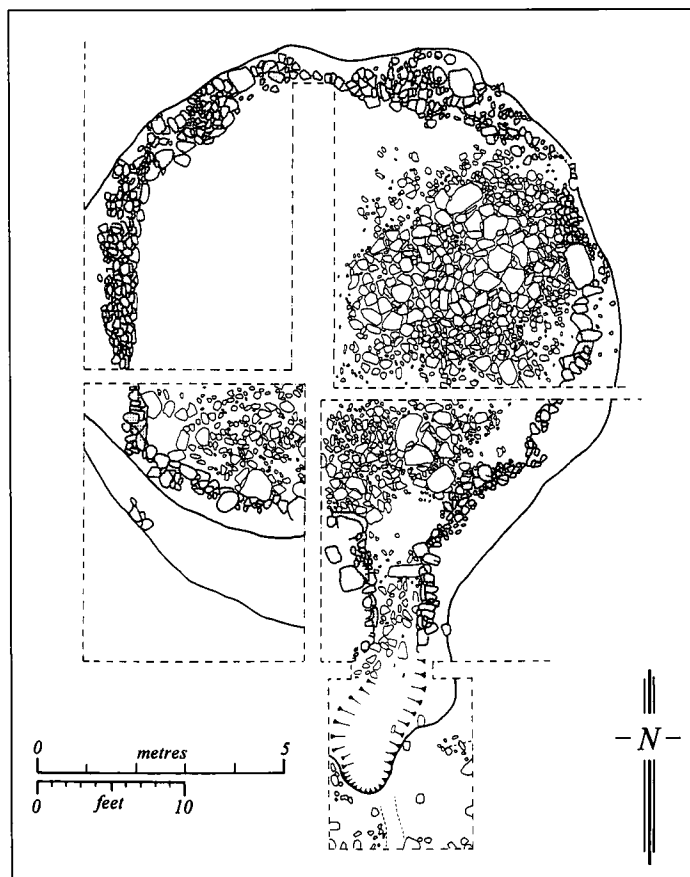
Turning to other crop-mark sites discovered from the air, considerable interest has recently been aroused by the appearance on the rich farming lands of East Fife of a distinctive group of densely black sub-rectangular 'blobs', indicating semi-subterranean buildings. The excavation of two groups of these in the vicinity of Easter Kinnear has fully justified the interest (Driscoll & Yeoman 1997).

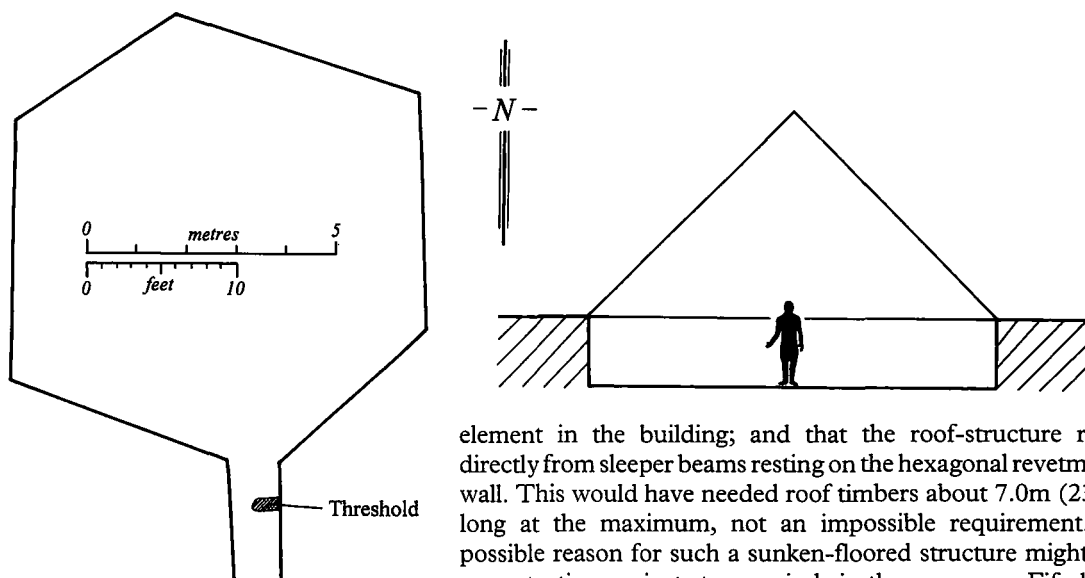
The summary presented here puts emphasis on the Hawkhill site as the more comprehensible of the two (Driscoll 1997, 91-8). The main feature was a polygonal scoop up to 1.4m (4ft 7in) deep in the local sands and gravels. The scoop was revetted by a wall of field stones, up to 1m (3ft 3in) wide. The wall-face is well-preserved on the west, rather less so on the NW and SW, and much more ragged on the east. The preserved wall-face clearly indicates a somewhat irregular hexagonal plan with maximum diagonals about 9.5m (31ft). The floor of the scoop is cobbled with stones of very irregular sizes from about 0.8m (2ft 6in) to fist-size, and consequently the surface is very uneven. There is a revetted passage on the south side, leading up from the floor of the scoop to the outside ground level, and with an apparent threshold stone half way along.

When the excavated features are thus described, the plans (illus 99; 100) seem both coherent and comprehensible. It is reasonable to postulate a hexagonal timber building, raised on sleeper beams resting on the revetment-wall. But what was the purpose of the scoop? The hypothesis has been suggested that it provided sub-floor storage for the timber building. But this creates two problems: a headroom of a mere 1.40m (4ft 7in) seems very inconvenient; and more seriously, what supported a floor spanning about 9.5m (31ft)? There is no evidence of either wooden or stone supports.

An alternative suggestion is that the revetment wall was the only vertical

99  
Hawkhill, Easter  
Kinnear: plan of  
semi-subterranean  
building (after  
Lorraine McEwan).





100  
Hawkhill: simplified cross-section of the semi-subterranean building roofed (after Lorraine McEwan).

element in the building; and that the roof-structure rose directly from sleeper beams resting on the hexagonal revetment wall. This would have needed roof timbers about 7.0m (23ft) long at the maximum, not an impossible requirement. A possible reason for such a sunken-floored structure might be as protection against strong winds in the very open Fifeshire terrain. The absence of occupation refuse on and among the cobbles of the floor may suggest that the building was a barn or byre. But plainly these suggestions can only be conjectural. At Easter Kinnear itself there is a rather irregular sub-rectangular revetted pit, which has been deliberately filled in (Driscoll & Yeoman 1997, 83-91). Subsequently the same area served as a stance for up to five post-and-wattle houses raised in trenches, which frequently intersected so that no clear plans emerge. The recurring pattern, however, suggests buildings with parallel sides and gently curving ends. The most important evidence is that charcoal, presumably from a burned building, gave calibrated radiocarbon dates of AD 556-650 and AD 581-654, pointing to activity in the mid-6th to mid-7th centuries AD. The earlier end of this bracket may be relevant to the date of the revetted pits at both Easter Kinnear and Hawkhill.

Finally, it should be noticed that there was evidence for rectangular buildings at both sites, but it was not possible to explore these fully. Moreover, the wider significance of the Easter Kinnear sites is that similar crop-marks have been recognized in south-east Perthshire as well. The conclusion must be that a further study of the air photographs, followed by selective excavations, is likely to expand considerably our knowledge of the settlements of the southern Picts.



As a tail-piece to this chapter, analysis of pins of the Late Atlantic Iron Age—that is, in chronological terms, from about the 3rd to the 8th or 9th centuries AD—shows that these occur in the Western Isles and Orkney, and also in Caithness, in a secondary context on broch sites which had been built many centuries earlier (Foster 1990, espec 172; 1992, 225). It is not clear whether ruined brochs were being utilised as quarries, or whether there was some ancestral connection which invited later settlement. In fact, while we can observe the occurrence of these essentially anachronistic pins on the broch sites, we cannot readily explain them.

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## CHURCHES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

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### 17.1 HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR CHURCH-BUILDING

#### 17.1.1 The earliest churches

When, in AD 597, king Æthelbert allowed Augustine and his fellow missionaries to settle in Kent, their first place of worship was a church built in the Roman period, in which the king's Frankish Christian queen was accustomed to pray. Subsequently, after Æthelbert's own conversion, they were allowed to restore churches which had been built in Roman times, and to build new ones. So Bede relates, presumably on the basis of reliable Canterbury traditions (*HE* i, 26).

Bede's mention of a church built in the Roman period is a reminder to us of the spread of Christianity, punctuated with periods of persecution, in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Evidence for actual church-building is scanty, however, and largely confined to the south-east of Britain (Jones & Mattingly 1990, map 8:28). One suggested reason for the lack of architectural evidence is that services were held in dedicated suites of rooms in both urban and rural houses. In northern Britain it can only be a matter of speculation that the destruction of some pagan temples along Hadrian's Wall was the work of Christians, or that—already in the 4th century—a bishop's seat was established at Carlisle.

In Ireland, by contrast, it can reasonably be accepted that Christian communities were established in the 5th century AD, especially, but not wholly, through the missionary work of St Patrick (O'Croinin 1995, Chaps 1 & 6). It is a reasonable conjecture that such congregations worshipped at small churches, probably of wood. The relevance of these to this study is, of course, as a background to the mission of Columba from Ireland to Iona.

Closer to Bernicia was the mission of Ninian, initially to the Britons in south-west Scotland, and ultimately to the southern Picts as well. So at least Bede relates (*HE* iii, 4), adding the circumstantial detail that he built a church of stone, known therefore as *Candida Casa*, the White, or Shining, House, from which Whithorn derived its English name of *Whitern*. The mythic or symbolic character of this will be discussed below.

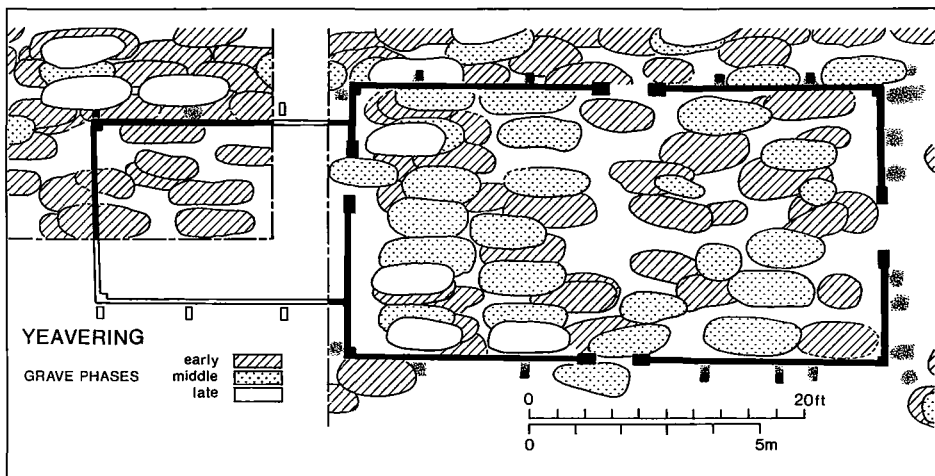
#### 17.1.2 From wood to stone

In Northumbria itself, one of the first churches—if not indeed *the* first church—to be built was that at York, erected during Edwin's preparation for baptism, which took place on Easter Day, April 12th, AD 627. This was also the seat of Paulinus as bishop of Northumbria. The church was erected hastily at first in wood. On the instruction of Paulinus this small oratory was then enclosed in a larger and more impressive basilica

of stone. It is interesting to note that, according to Bede, the stone church was still incomplete at the time of Edwin's death, five or six years later, and had to be completed by Edwin's successor, Oswald (*HE* i, 13). This is a valuable indication of how long it might take to erect a stone church (*ibid*).

The church at York was not the only one to be built in the days of Paulinus and Edwin, though the actual evidence is scanty. Bede, however, does relate that at the royal township of Cambodunum, also in Deira, a church was burned down, together with all the buildings of the township, by the pagans who killed Edwin (*HE* ii, 14). Curiously enough, there is no mention of a church at Yeavinger, though one has been identified there by excavation (Hope-Taylor 1977, 72-3; 166-8 with fig 33; illus 101 here).

101  
Yeavinger: wooden  
church, with three  
phases of burials  
(after Hope-Taylor).



The construction of churches in wood continued for some years after the accession of Oswald. The direct evidence for this is Bede's comment that Finan, bishop of Northumbria from AD 651 to 661, built a church at Lindisfarne of hewn oak (*HE* iii, 25). It may also be inferred that his predecessor, Aidan, had a wooden church at a royal township in the vicinity of Bamburgh. He died leaning against a buttress of the church; and when, some years later, Penda burned the township and the church, the buttress post survived unburned. A timber church is plainly implied (*HE* iii, 17).

From about AD 670, however, there are frequent mentions of the building of stone churches in Northumbria. One stimulus to this was no doubt the outcome of Benedict Biscop's fourth continental visit in 675, when he went specifically to recruit masons to build a stone church in the Roman manner. When the church was almost complete, he sent messengers to Gaul to bring glaziers (*VBA*, 189). There is a minor echo of this importation of masons in the second decade of the 8th century, when Nechtan, son of Derile, king of the southern Picts, asked Ceolfrith, abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, to send him masons, likewise to build a stone church in the Roman style (*HE* v, 21).

These statements by Bede, man of the cloister, are deceptively simple. Masons and glaziers are recruited: churches arise and windows of coloured glass are inserted. No practical or technical difficulties are mentioned, but in reality they would have been enormous for a timber-building culture. To mention a few: firstly, suitable stone had to be found, and quarries opened. Even if much of the masonry came from Roman ruins, it

would have to be cleaned and moved to the building site, requiring the recruitment of labour and transport. On site, labourers of varying degrees of skill would have to be recruited, trained and managed. Scaffolding and hoists would have to be erected. Suitable sources of limestone for making mortar would have to be sought out, quarries opened, and the processes of burning and slaking lime introduced. For the glaziers, even if only colourless glass was to be produced, suitable sands and reducing minerals would have to be located. These and other technical problems add up to a technological revolution, while the recruiting and managing of labour and transport would have had marked social and economic implications.

These thoughts arise initially as a response to Bede's bland statements about the building work of Benedict Biscop. In the years AD 672 x 678, Wilfrid had built two churches which excelled those of Benedict in architectural splendour—if, that is, the statements of Wilfrid's biographer Stephen are to be credited (*VW*, chaps 17 & 22). More will be said about that below. Again we glean nothing from Stephen about the technical problems involved. We do at least learn of the risks involved in building high pinnacles, when one of the builders falls to the ground: an excellent opportunity for a miracle of healing on Wilfrid's part (*VW*, chap 23).

## 17.2 MATERIAL EVIDENCE FOR CHURCHES: BERNICIA

From this historical outline of the beginnings of church building in northern Britain, we may turn to the existing remains of early churches, firstly in Bernicia and secondly among the Britons, Picts and Scots, including areas of Bernician expansion.

### 17.2.1 Escomb

A good starting point is the church, probably of late 7th- or early 8th-century date, at Escomb, Co. Durham (Fernie 1983, 53–6; Taylor & Taylor 1965, 234–8; illus 102 & 103 here). This has survived virtually intact, and the few alterations are easily discounted. Moreover, its basic plan is repeated in others of the simpler Bernician churches (for instance, at Bywell, Corbridge and Seaham), and also as one component of a large monastery at Jarrow.

The original plan of Escomb comprises a nave three times as long as it is wide, that is, 13.24m by 4.42m (43ft 5in by 14ft 6in). There is a roughly square eastern chamber or chancel, separated from the nave by a tall, narrow chancel arch. In the middle of the north wall is an original doorway, and one jamb of the original south door is also preserved. The windows—two round-headed in the south wall, two flat-lintelled in the north wall, and a round-headed one high in the west gable—are splayed: that is to say, the outer opening is markedly narrower than the inner one. In view of the overall quality of the masonry, it is unlikely that the intention of the minimal size of the windows was to minimize the weakening of the wall itself.

102  
Escomb church,  
south exterior  
(*English Heritage*)





103  
Escomb church:  
interior looking  
towards altar and  
chancel (*English  
Heritage*).

7m (23ft) high and the chancel arch is 4.6m (15ft) high. In human terms, if we take the average height of an Anglo-Saxon adult male as 1.72m (5ft 8in) (Marlow 1992, 113), then the chancel arch is about two-and-a-half times as high, the side walls are four times as high, and the apex of the roof considerably higher again. This awesome visual effect is enhanced, of course, by the narrowness and length of the nave.

The precision of the layout of Escomb is matched by the exceptionally high quality of the masonry. Admittedly, this is in part the result of the re-use of stones from a demolished Roman building, as is demonstrated by the character of the surface-dressing, and even the incorporation, upside down, of a fragmentary Roman inscription. The chancel arch itself is considered to have been dismantled and re-erected from a neighbouring Roman fort. This would have been no simple operation, and Fernie has rightly stressed the technical problems involved in such work (1983, 55).

Altogether, we may see a powerful symbolism in Escomb's many 'romanising' features. In this sense, Escomb is a symbol of ecclesiastical politics, and the triumph of the Roman party. We should also notice a minor iconographic hint in the sundial, high on the south wall, a symbol of transience in contrast to the message of eternity within the church itself.

Architectural and iconographic aspects apart, this was also a building in which a Christian community worshipped, and received the rites of baptism, the mass, and prayers for the dead. Taylor (1973) has argued that, in early Anglo-Saxon churches, the altar normally stood in the nave—that is, just to the west of the chancel arch. If we allow for this, then the nave at Escomb, small though it appears to be, could have accommodated a standing congregation of about 84 adults. Similar numbers might be expected in the other small churches mentioned above. What sort of groups were these in terms of social and ecclesiastical arrangements?

On the basis of a detailed study of early Anglo-Saxon churches in County Durham, Cambridge (1984) has argued that churches which have associated remains of sculpture

It is more likely that the purpose was to reduce the area of glazing, while at the same time maximizing the light entering the nave. For Bede, however, in his exegetical work, *de Templo*, the splayed windows recalled those of Solomon's temple; and from this he developed further symbolic interpretations, discussed below (17.4). It is of considerable interest that Escomb, like the larger churches of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, has yielded fragments of coloured window glass in the course of excavations (Cramp 1971).

The walls have been laid out with great accuracy, the difference in length of the long walls being only 1 part in 520. This makes it possible to demonstrate that the diagonal measurement of the chancel is also the width of the nave, and one third its length. The walls have a uniform width of 0.72m (2ft 4in), a measurement which was governed by the width of the large stones which formed the jambs of the chancel arch.

Because the walls of the nave, including the west gable, are still standing to their original height, the modern observer can readily appreciate the impressive visual effect of the nave. The walls are

would have been what Bede would have called *monasteria*, though it is not completely clear whether we should translate this as ‘minster’ or as ‘monastery’—if indeed there was any clear functional distinction at the time. Despite the lack of any trace of conventual buildings, the occurrence of fragments of sculptured crosses built into the walls at Escomb would qualify it as a *monasterium*; most probably, in Cambridge’s view, as a dependency of the neighbouring St Andrew Auckland.

From Escomb, a splendid monument but one lacking any history, we may turn to two major monasteries famous in history, but with more fragmentary remains: Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. Both were founded by Benedict Biscop and therefore owe much to the masons and glaziers whom he had recruited from Gaul. They tell us much about the buildings of a late 7th-century monastery; but we must first briefly describe their churches (Cramp 1994 for recent account; plans here illus 104).

### 17.2.2 Monkwearmouth and Jarrow

Monkwearmouth, founded in AD 674, had a long narrow nave similar to that at Escomb, though markedly larger: 19.5m (64ft) long and 5.64m (18ft 6in) wide, and with walls about 10m (30ft) high. There are narrow aisles to north and south of the nave, and a long narrow chancel. Subsequently, but probably before 685, a two-storey western porch was added, decorated with an undistinguished carving of interlaced beasts (Taylor & Taylor 1965, 432–46; Fernie 1983, 50–2; Cramp 1984a, 125–6; pls 112–115).

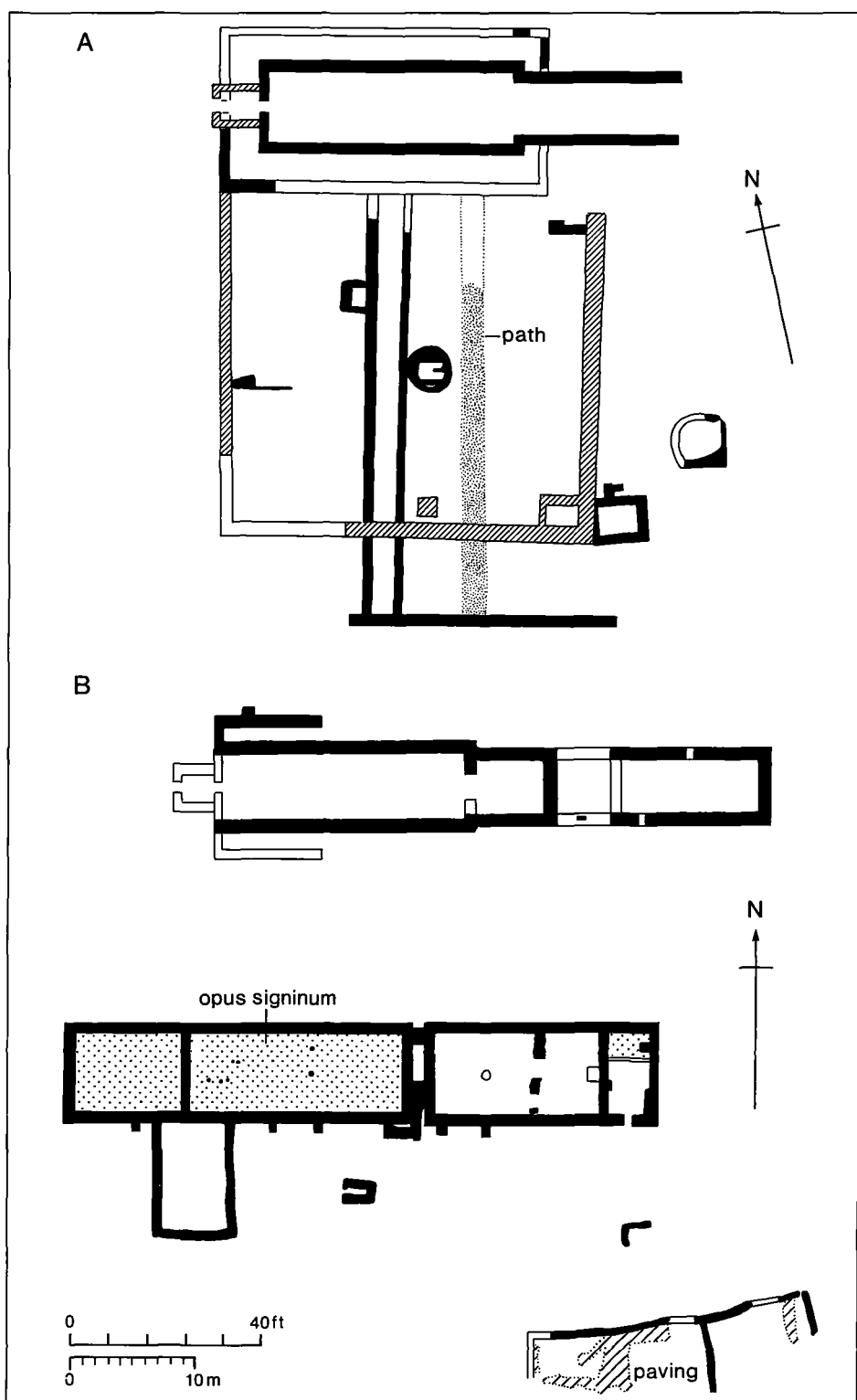
To the south of the church itself was a narrow gallery over 36m (120ft) long, which may have led to a range of domestic buildings (like those at Jarrow), or perhaps a chapel or minor church. The gallery was built of mortared stone, roofed with slates and lead flashing, and with coloured window glazing. Another interesting discovery was that of one, and perhaps two, mortar mixers.

Jarrow was founded in AD 681, after a further visit by Benedict to Gaul, and was dedicated in April 685: a further indication of how long it might take to build a major church. The original church had at its core a nave comparable with that at Monkwearmouth, but with a short, almost square, chancel. There was also a western porch, but it is not clear whether this was an early feature. In other respects however, Jarrow was altogether a more elaborate structure than that at Monkwearmouth. The long walls of the nave were in fact arcades, opening on the north to a narrow aisle, and on the south to wider chambers. The inspiration of this architectural elaboration must have been some corresponding liturgical practice, but its precise character eludes us.

At Jarrow there was also an eastern building in line with that just described. This, which may have been a funerary chapel, had not necessarily been built at the same time, but it was probably broadly contemporary in use with the western church (Taylor & Taylor 1965, 388–49; Fernie 1983, 48–50).

Immediately south of the main range was a cemetery, and to the south of that again there were two conventual buildings, parallel to the south side of the church. Basically they were large stone-built halls. The larger, 28m (91ft 6in) in length by 8m (26ft) wide, had a floor of concrete and brick chips—the Roman technique known as *opus signinum*. A stone base, possibly for a lectern, was set in the floor, and the hall has therefore been interpreted as a refectory. The other hall, of the same width but only 18.5m (60ft) long, had apparently a small private suite at one end, possibly for the abbot. The larger room

104  
 A: Monkwearmouth,  
 Saxon phase  
 3; B: Jarrow,  
 excavated Saxon  
 stone buildings  
 (after Cramp 1994).



had a high seat against the east wall and benching along the south wall, suggesting that it was the chapter-house. Walls running off to the south suggest that we may be seeing the north range, and part of the west range, of a cloister (for the previous six paragraphs, see Cramp 1976a, 1976b, 1994).

A major interest of these excavations lies in the material confirmation which they provide for Bede's statements about the introduction of Gaulish masons and glaziers by Benedict Bishop. Moreover, they provide a wealth of close parallels with contemporary churches on the Continent (Cramp 1994). They also emphasize the architectural superiority of Benedict's two foundations, especially in the use of stone as the major building material. By contrast, extensive excavations at Hartlepool (Daniels 1988) and Whithorn (Hill 1997) have revealed only wooden structures (sometimes on a stone base) in Anglo-Saxon monastic contexts.

### 17.2.3 Hexham

Escomb, Jarrow and Monkwearmouth have presented impressive churches, but of relatively simple design. For a church of supposedly elaborate plan, we must turn to Wilfrid's church, dedicated to St Andrew, at Hexham, Northumberland. Unfortunately our knowledge of this comes chiefly from Wilfrid's biographer, Stephen, who is not renowned for presenting his patron's works in modest terms. However that might be, he would at least have been familiar with the building. He regrets that his feeble tongue does not permit him to enlarge on the features of the church, while his poetic vocabulary and rhetorical style must inhibit us from attempting a literal translation.

He refers to foundations deep in the earth; crypts (*domibus*) of wonderfully polished stone; various supports or buttresses (*columnis*) above ground; many galleries (or? side-chapels, *porticibus*); walls of wonderful length and height; winding passages; and spiral stairs (*per coeleas*: like a snail-shell) (*VW*, 22).

Such structures would have been very appropriate for processions and the activities of the theatre of the Mass. Given Stephen's habitual exaggeration when writing of his hero, we might feel the need for some physical evidence to support his account; but very little of Wilfrid's church has survived, except for some fragments of architectural sculpture, and the crypt. These exceptions are nonetheless significant, given the quality of the sculptures and the refinement of the crypt in both plan and masonry. They might lead us to accept the spirit of Stephen's eulogy, even if we must abandon any hope of establishing a definitive plan and elevation for Hexham St Andrews (for recent attempts at a reconstructed plan, see Fernie 1983, 60-3 with fig 32; Bailey 1991, fig 6.)

The outstanding Wilfredan structure still remaining at Hexham is undoubtedly the crypt (Bailey 1991). This lay beneath the floor of the church, on its main axis towards the east end. It consists of a vaulted chamber and antechamber, respectively 4m by 1.3m (13ft 6in x 7ft 6in) and 2.74m (9ft) high, and 2.74m by 1.37m (9ft x 4ft 6in), together with two lesser chambers, and stairs for access and egress (illus 105 and 106 after Bailey 1991, fig 4). The whole structure was built of re-used Roman masonry, originally plastered over. There were three (perhaps originally four) niches to hold lamps or candles in the main chamber, and another in the antechamber; but apparently none to light the stairs.

This brief factual account does no justice to the subjective impressions which Early

Christian pilgrims would have received. Bailey, writing of Hexham (and of a similar crypt at Ripon in Deira, and therefore beyond the territory of this survey), describes the effect as both awe-inspiring and disorientating. His perceptive account deserves to be cited *verbatim*:

‘Pilgrims entered by the north passage, plunging beneath the ground to shuffle down a narrow, sharply turning passage with steep and awkward steps. They then moved into a gloomy and claustrophobic ante-chamber, filled with the smoke of candles. Through the doorway to the east they would then be presented with the dramatic contrast of the main chamber, where lights set in the lamp-niches reflected off the jewelled gold, silver and bronze caskets in which the relics were enshrined. Architecturally and luminously, the crypt thus managed to

106  
Hexham crypt: the  
interior, with steps  
in background  
(Northumberland  
County Council)



express both the difficulties of pilgrimage and the glorious revelation of God and his saints granted to the faithful. After veneration the pilgrims could return to the church by the western flight of steps’ (Bailey 1993).

To this numinous account, we may add two comments. Firstly, it is in the Hexham crypt that we come closest to Stephen’s ‘foundations deep in the earth’, and ‘winding passages’. And secondly, the descent below ground and subsequent re-emergence into the body of the church must have presented pilgrims with a vivid reminder of Christ’s own resurrection.

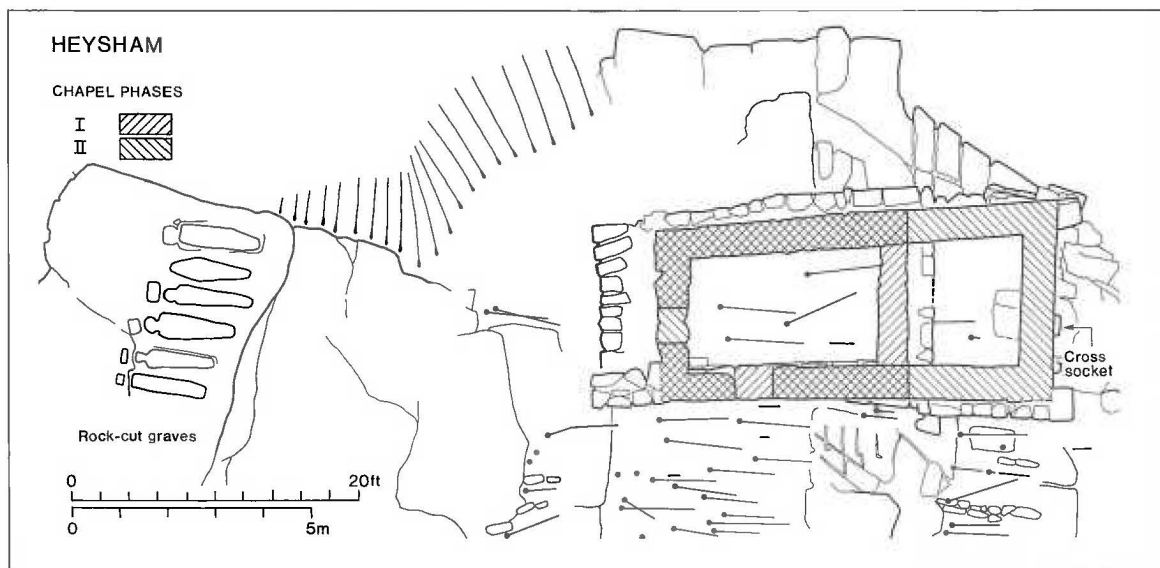
On the axial line of Hexham St Andrews, Hodges recorded remains which have been accepted as another Anglo-Saxon church (Taylor & Taylor 1965, figs 130-132; accepted by Fernie 1983, fig 31). Compared with St Andrews, this is quite small: only 7.3m by 3.35m (24ft x 11ft). Its plan, however, is extremely interesting, because the overall length is divided into a nave, about 4.57m (15ft) long, and a semi-circular apse slightly narrower than the nave. Hodges’ drawing seems to indicate a stone seat at the centre of the apse, with narrow benches on either side; but this may be conjecture rather than fact.

The remarkable feature of this is that it is the only apsidal east end known among the early Anglo-Saxon churches of Northumbria. For other apses of early Anglo-Saxon, or at

least pre-Danish, date we would have to turn to Mercia (the nearest being at Brixworth) and Kent (Ferne 1983, chaps 3 and 5). These, however, are all larger and more elaborate than that at Hexham. There are also small examples of apsidal churches at Colchester (Castle Bailey) and Little Braxted in Essex (W & K Rodwell 1977, 38). Moreover, churches with apsidal chancels, and of various sizes and degrees of elaboration, would surely have been well known to such regular travellers in Gaul and the Mediterranean lands as Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop.

#### 17.2.4 Heysham

107  
Plan of Heysham  
church (after Potter  
1994).



At the opposite extreme to Hexham in terms of size and splendour is the first phase of the chapel or oratory and associated cemetery at Heysham, Lancashire, which may perhaps be assigned geographically to Greater Bernicia. This has been dated in the late 7th to late 8th century (Potter & Andrews 1994: note especially plan, fig 29; elevations, figs 15-17; illus 107 here). The chapel was trapezoidal in plan, and measured internally a mere 4m (13ft) long by 2.3m (7ft 6in) in average width. It appears to have had a door in the west gable, but too little survives of the walls to reveal the fenestration. Despite its small size, it was not without some pretension. The walls were plastered inside and out, the inner face bearing a painted inscription in Roman capitals. Among the debris from phase 1 was a stone finial or terminal carved with a bird's head.

108  
Heysham: possible  
reliquary pits  
(Potter).



The location is a low but rocky headland, and it appears that the Christian use of the headland began with the cutting in the rock surface of six grave-like pits; at the head of five of these are rectangular pits which had probably held crosses

109  
Heysham: south  
exterior (*Potter*).

(illus 108). The pits are too narrow and shallow to have contained human bodies, and they are therefore interpreted as reliquaries to hold the bones of clerics; according to tradition, one contained those of St Patrick. This, then, was the focus, firstly for the building of the original chapel, which then attracted a normal cemetery; and secondly for a larger church, dedicated to St Peter, to the east.



The headland looks out over Morecambe Bay, and more widely across the Irish Sea. It is therefore relevant that the rather short, broad proportions of the chapel recall other Irish Sea and Irish sites, rather than the notably narrower naves of eastern Bernicia. The dedication to St Patrick may also be significant. That said, the three courses of large squared blocks, which are all that remain of phase 1, are characteristic of the best of early Anglo-Saxon masonry, while the enlarged second-phase chapel has a characteristic round-headed south door (illus 109).

### 17.3 EVIDENCE FOR CHURCH-BUILDING IN SCOTLAND

#### 17.3.1 Churches in the south-west

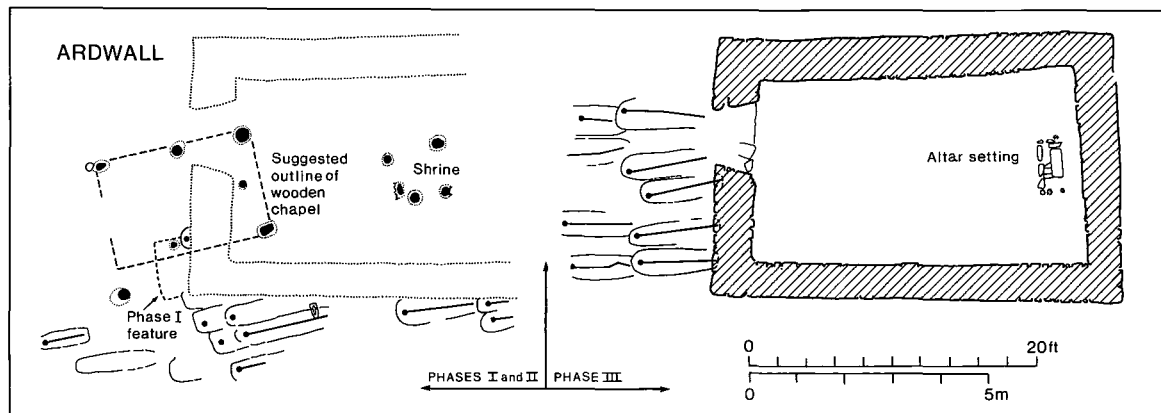
Beyond Bernicia, the richest evidence for early churches comes from south-west Scotland. There we find churches exhibiting Irish Sea influences, and others of Northumbrian character in both stone and wood. The leading sites are Ardwall, Kirkcudbrightshire, Hoddum, Dumfries-shire, and Whithorn, Wigtownshire.

##### Ardwall

Ardwall Isle is a tidal island on the coast of the Solway Firth (Thomas 1967). Here, perhaps in the later 5th century, a small Christian cemetery was founded beside a small rock-cut hollow. This was considered by the excavator to have held a 'so-called "slab-shrine"' of Irish type, and possibly late 6th-century date (Thomas 1967, 167-9). Later activity in the area had, however, destroyed all evidence of the shrine itself.

The next phase saw the erection of a small oblong wooden building, internally about 3m (10ft) long by 2m (7ft) wide. This had been raised on six posts, of which the positions of four could be located, defining the north and east sides (Thomas 1967, 138-41). Several burials on a parallel alignment were presumably contemporary. Again there is a good Irish parallel at Church Island, Valencia, Co Kerry (O'Kelly 1958; Edwards 1990, fig 54c).

This wooden building was in turn replaced by a stone oratory on a slightly different orientation, with a further series of aligned burials (illus 110). The plan was a slightly skewed rectangle, measuring internally about 7m (23ft) by 4m (13ft), with a splayed



doorway off-centre in the west wall. The fabric was of roughly-coursed rubble in a clay binding. Against the east wall were the collapsed remains of a slab-built altar, with a cavity for relics, and a cross-incised *mensa*-slab. For the plan there is again a good parallel at Church Island, Valencia. A date in the 8th century is suggested; but a bracket of later 7th/early 8th may be more appropriate.

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Ardwall Isle;  
wooden and dry-  
stone churches,  
Phases I and III  
(after Thomas  
1967).

### Hoddom

At Hoddom, the Northumbrian-style monastery is in stark contrast to the Ardwall oratory and cemetery. Minor excavations in 1915, and again about 1953, uncovered part of the nave of a masonry church, to which a chancel had subsequently been added (Radford 1953). The stones had evidently been quarried from the Roman fort at Birrens, some 3.7 miles (6km) distant. In addition to this masonry, the quoins at the corner of the nave were found to be of megalithic character, typical of those at Northumbrian monasteries of the later 7th or earlier 8th centuries, such as Jarrow and Escomb. Moreover, the occurrence of fragments of magnificent sculptured crosses, probably of the 8th century, bore witness to the importance of the Hoddom monastery.

Recently, geophysical prospecting, followed by excavations, has greatly expanded the earlier information (Lowe 1991). The monastic site, on a terrace of the river Annan, is now known to have been enclosed by a *vallum* consisting of a ditch and fence, and in places a bank as well (illus 111). The overall area is about 8ha (20 acres). Around the perimeter are a number of buildings, partly of timber, partly of stone. These include an apparent bread-oven, a corn-drying kiln, and a smoke-house for curing meat. There is also some evidence for smithing. It becomes possible to create a picture of the domestic and craft activities which were an essential part of the life and work of a monastic community.

The interpretation of one other structure poses a considerable problem. This was an oblong tank, internally 4.5m by 2.6m (15ft x 8.5ft) which had been set into a pit about 1.15m (3.8ft) deep. The walls, of clay-bonded re-used Roman masonry, were set on a flagged floor, and had probably supported a timber superstructure. The intention seems to have been to create a water-tight tank. In the south wall, a carefully built gap, 0.3m (1ft) wide, led into an earth-cut channel with a flagged floor similar to that of the tank. The channel was presumably a run-off from the tank.

A possible interpretation is that this was a baptistry. While such a structure could be

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Plans of two monastic enclosures: above, Iona (hatching denotes primary Columban area; after Barber 1981); below, Hoddom (hatching denotes area of archaeological investigation; after Lowe 1991).



expected at a monastery, there are objections to the interpretation in this instance. Examples from Gaul and the Mediterranean are usually close to a church, and are round or polygonal in plan. Apart from its shape, the Hoddum tank lies over 200m (220yds) from the church. In the other direction, the river Annan is only about 50m (55yds) from the church. Given the biblical precedent for baptism in the river Jordan (Mark, 1:5 and 9), reinforced in northern Britain by the example of Paulinus in the river Glen (*HE* ii, 14), it seems likely that the Annan would have been used at Hoddum. This leaves the possible function of the tank as some water-dependent industry such as tanning or dyeing, or even a cistern for drinking water.

### Whithorn

At Whithorn, as we have already seen (above 14.2.3), the church of Ninian's foundation was most probably set on the summit of the hill, which is now occupied by the later medieval and modern church and cemetery. Archaeological exploration is therefore inhibited. Around this core, however, in the transect excavated between 1984 and 1991 (Hill 1997), there are two concentric zones: the outer for industrial and domestic activities and the inner devoted to burials and ritual or religious activities. It appears that, at dates which certainly embrace the Northumbrian bishopric at Whithorn, several timber churches were built in succession. One of these was some 18m (60ft) long by 4.5m (15ft) wide. These proportions, of 4:1, are strikingly narrower than those of the Bernician churches described above.

### 17.3.2 Churches north of the Forth-Clyde line

By contrast with the south-west, north of the Forth-Clyde isthmus material evidence of churches is extremely hard to find. This is especially true in eastern Scotland, despite Bede's record that Ceolfrith, abbot of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, had sent builders at the request of the Pictish king Nechtan in the second decade of the 8th century (*HE* v, 2). There are no early architectural remains at major historically-noticed ecclesiastical centres such as Dunkeld and St Andrews (Cowan 1975); nor at the sites inferred from the evidence of *egles* place-names as indicators of early churches (Barrow 1983). It would seem reasonable to believe that clusters of early crosses and cross-slabs would have stood in churchyards, but if so, nothing is visible earlier than the 12th century (Henderson 1975, maps 9 & 10; Duncan 1996, 330-2). Finally Fernie has argued powerfully that a number of churches which had been regarded as exemplifying the earliest masonry buildings in Christian Scotland are no earlier than the end of the late 11th century (Ferne 1986).

### Forteviot

We are left with two tantalizing objects. The first is a carved stone, forming the greater part of a monolithic arch, from the Picto-Scottish royal centre at Forteviot (illus 81 above). The central motif of the arch is a cross accompanied by a lamb; these are flanked to the viewer's left by a large figure, probably a king, and to the right by two or possibly three lesser figures. The cross and lamb, indicating a Paschal theme, suggest that the arch may have been the chancel arch from what must certainly have been a masonry building. Stylistically, a 9th-century date seems appropriate. Further speculation about the architectural setting is unrewarding. (But for speculation about the social and political context of the arch, see 14.3 above). We can only regret the loss, through a combination of human and natural agencies, of a very interesting building (Alcock & Alcock 1992, 223-7).

The second consists of two non-joining fragments from a slab shrine like the St Andrews sarcophagus (see below 22.2.2), which had been discovered at Burghead in the 19th century (illus 62). One is part of a rather crudely carved corner-post, while the other, from either a side or an end slab, has a vigorous carving of two hounds attacking a stag (ECMS, figs 138 & 141). These fragments, though slight in themselves, must imply the existence of an important church of the 8th or 9th century at Burghead. This can certainly be asserted in the case of the slab-shrines at St Andrews and at Jedburgh.

In all three cases, the church itself has been demolished. At Burghead, however, it is possible to interpret the water-tank or well (above 13.3.2) as a baptistery, belonging to a major church. The square tank, about 3.05m (10ft) square, 1.3m (4ft 4in) deep, and with a ledge 0.76m (2ft 6in) wide around it, would seem very suitable for such a purpose.

### Iona

In Dál Riata, the major site is of course, Iona. It is greatly to be regretted that the available material evidence fails altogether to match the historical and religious significance of St Columba's foundation. The island may appear remote if approached by land, along the rocky and barren Ross of Mull. But Adomnán's *Life of Columba* makes it clear that the inhabitants were great seafarers, and for them Iona was readily accessible from the west coast and islands of Dál Riata, as well as from northern Ireland and the Irish Sea. The area of the island is about 800ha (2000 acres). The relief is rugged, though the highest point, Dun I, is no more than 100m (330ft) high. In former times, there was much cultivation, but this has largely been superseded by grazing.

The actual site of the Columban and later monastery was on the sheltered western shore of the Sound of Iona. There, banks and ditches, some obvious on the ground today, others visible from the air, or discoverable by geophysical prospecting or excavation, mark the *vallum* which enclosed the monastery (illus 111 and col illus I.2). There is some agreement that there may have been two or more periods of construction in the vallum. The area enclosed was about 8ha (20 acres), comparable in size therefore to that at Hoddom, and considerably larger than that at Coludesburh at 3ha (7 acres). But two competent bodies have produced—almost simultaneously—plans of the Iona vallum which differ in significant details of layout and interpretation (compare Barber 1981, figs 46 & 47 with RCAHMS 1982, p 6).

As for the buildings of the Columban monastery, whether the church (or churches), or the buildings of the community, we have no coherent knowledge. It is very likely that the principal church was subsequently overlaid by the medieval church, and that evidence is therefore irrecoverable. Beyond the NW corner of the medieval nave was a small chapel, internally 3.2m x 2.3m (10ft 6in x 7ft 6in), with a simple west door flanked by *antae*, that is, buttress-like extensions of the side walls of the building, 0.55m (1ft 10in) deep. These suggest an Irish origin and a date; but it is considered 'unlikely to be earlier than the 9th or 10th century' (RCAHMS 1982, 41-2; plan p 52).

On Torr an Abba, a rocky spine to the west of the medieval abbey, excavation has revealed a minor structure consisting of a sub-circular stone footing, which may have had a wooden superstructure. In keeping with the general Ionan tradition of seeking Columban connections, 'this building has been identified by the excavator as Columba's cell, but the claim must be regarded as doubtful' (RCAHMS 1982, 40). Elsewhere, small-scale excavations have revealed tantalizing glimpses of timber buildings, in the

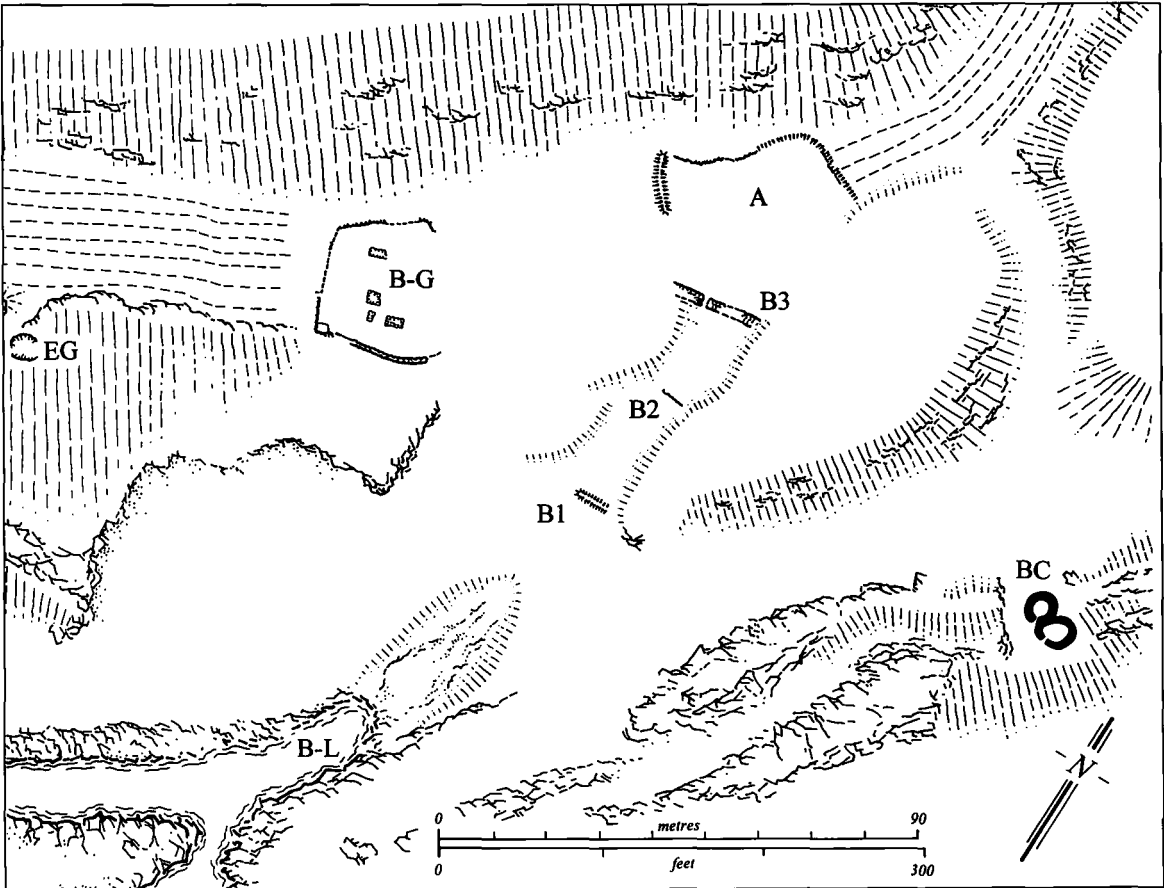
form of postholes or beam slots; but no coherent chronology or plans have emerged. It is difficult to see Iona as anything other than a sorry tale of missed opportunities.

Other west-coast island sites

Fortunately, religious sites of Irish type have been protected by their very remoteness from the depredations of subsequent builders, restorers, and excavators. One is on the rugged Eileach an Naoimh (Rock of the Saint—probably St Brendan), the south-west island of the group of four known as the Garvellachs (from *Garbh Eileach*, Rough Rock). These lie off the west coast, roughly half way between the north tip of Jura and the south coast of Mull, in notoriously tricky waters. The islands are described as looking from the sea like bare skerries, though on the east side, away from the Atlantic, there are secluded glens and hollows (Murray 1973, 263).

On Eileach an Naoimh, just above a natural boat-landing, is a scattered group of buildings and enclosures (RCAHMS 1984, 170–82; illus 112 here). From the landing place (B-L), a gully, partly blocked by three cross walls (B 1–3), runs up to an inner enclosure (A). To the west are a burial ground with a simple cross-incised slab (B-G), and ‘Eithne’s Grave’ (EG). The latter is a circular enclosure about 3m (10ft) in diameter, with a stone kerb, and a simple cross-incised slab. This is traditionally regarded as the burial place of Columba’s mother.

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Ecclesiastical and other remains on Eileach an Naoimh (for lettering, see text)  
(Crown copyright RCAHMS).

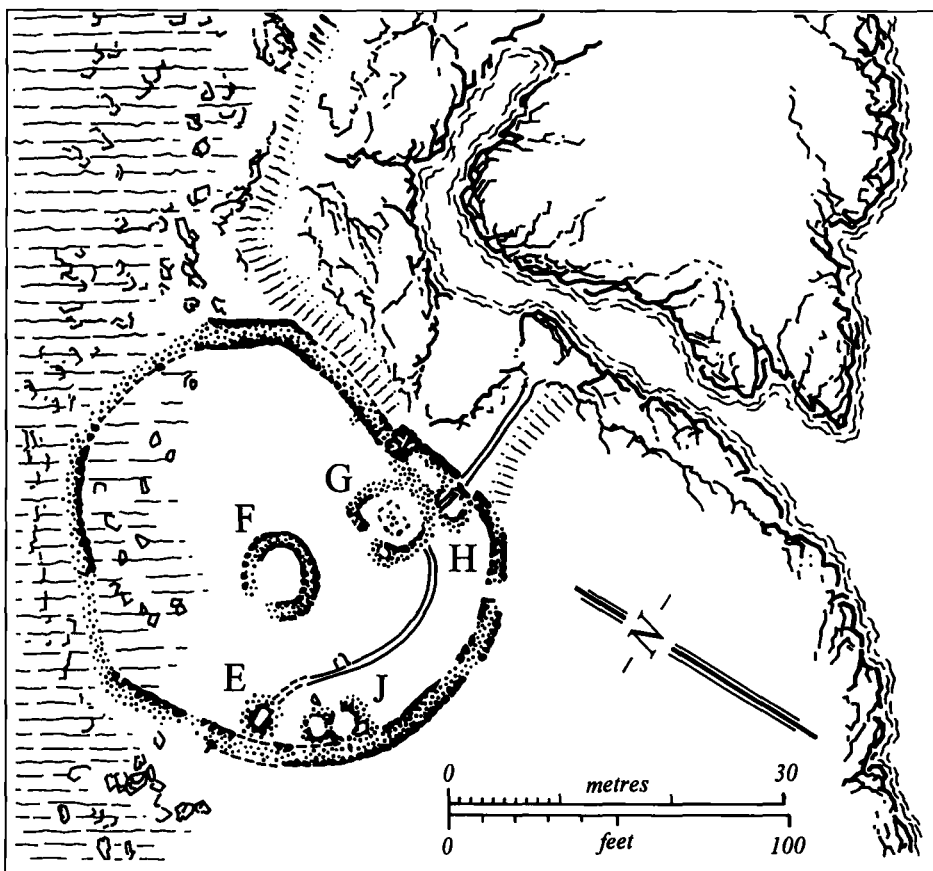


South-east of the inner enclosure are two conjoined beehive cells (B-C): that is to say, a pair of dry-stone corbelled structures, roughly circular in plan. These are respectively 4.8m (15ft 9in) and 4.1m (13ft 5in) in diameter, and are linked by a low passage no more than 0.6m (2ft) wide. They immediately recall the beehive cells, sometimes of double plan, which are common on early Irish monastic sites, especially—but not exclusively—in Co Kerry (Edwards 1990, 114-21). In summary: some of the buildings on Eileach an Naoimh clearly recall the smaller ecclesiastical sites in Ireland.

A similar early religious site with sea-access has been identified on the south coast of the island of Canna (description: Dunbar & Fisher 1974; plan: RCAHMS 1995, 14; illus 113). This has the evocative name of *Sgor nam Ban-naomha*, Cliff of the Holy Women. On a shelf about 60m (200ft) wide, between the sea-cliffs and a rugged, bouldery slope, are a number of dry-stone buildings. Some of these probably date to the Early Christian period, on the evidence of fragments of two cross-carved slabs found there in 1994.

There are dry-stone structures of two periods, of which the earlier ones are set within a wall enclosing a roughly circular area, internally 40m by 30m (120ft x 100ft). More or less in the centre is a strongly built circular structure about 4.6m (15ft) in diameter, with a secondary porch: clearly the main building of the site (F). Other much smaller structures are placed around the perimeter, and are connected with an elaborate water-system. Structure E is a well-house incorporating a spring, from which water flows to structures

113  
Ecclesiastical site of  
*Sgor nam Ban-  
Naomha*, Canna  
(Crown copyright  
RCAHMS).



G and H before exiting to the sea-cliff. Structure J likewise has a water channel, which flows from outside the enclosure wall to join the flow from E. Structure G incorporates a stone platform resembling a large hearth, and it has been suggested that this was a sweat-house. It is unlikely that the water channels are for a mill-wheel. Indeed, the purpose of the water-system is quite obscure; and it may have served a multiple function for drinking, washing, bathing (including ritual bathing), and sanitation.

The remote and rugged setting of these two sites is wholly consistent with the Early Christian emphasis on pilgrimages, initially to the Holy Places of Palestine, but subsequently to the deserts and other remote places. For the Irish, including the settlers in western Scotland, pilgrimages over the ocean replaced those to the desert. Such travels might have a penitential aspect, as is sometimes suggested of Columba's migration to Iona. This is too large a topic to be pursued here, but these brief hints provide a background to the religious settlements on Eileach an Naomh and on Canna. (For wider background: *Encyclopedia*, 688; for Ireland, Hughes 1966, 91 ff; for Columba, Sharpe 1995, 12 ff and other examples in notes 109 & 327; for Irish parallels to Cuthbert on Farne, Herity 1989.)

## 17.4 THE ICONOGRAPHY OF CHURCHES

The concept of an iconography of architecture, especially that of medieval architecture in the widest chronological sense, was first introduced by R Krautheimer in 1941 (1997). He drew particular attention to the medieval practice of copying earlier buildings of especial religious significance. By a detailed study of copies of the Anastasis Church, or Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, he was able to show that the copies were never faithful in detail: indeed, modern observers might never have considered some examples to be 'copies' if we did not know that such was the expressed intention of the patron or the architect. Apart from differences of scale, the copies were quite eclectic, so that in some cases, the twelve columns of the Anastasis rotunda were copied, in others the eight piers—in each case with a different, but equally valid, symbolism.

### 17.4.1 Church architecture of Mediterranean style (*more Romanorum*)

With these thoughts in mind, we might consider the small apsidal church to the east of St Andrews Hexham. This might have been intended simply as a scaled-down version of a church with a larger chancel and a more elaborate nave, such as could be seen at Reculver in Kent, or more widely in Gaul or the Mediterranean. Alternatively, it may have adopted a single element, namely an apsidal-ended chancel, from a much larger basilica: in that case surely from across the English Channel. In either case, there is an implied reference to a church in a style alien to contemporary Northumbria. If Hodges's observations can be relied on, then it is particularly interesting that he shows a bench round the apse, with a stone throne at its centre. This suggests that the model had not been a small private chapel or oratory.

The systematic application of Krautheimer's ideas to Anglo-Saxon architecture began with a paper by R Gem (1983). In the first part of his paper, Gem discussed Bede's emphasis on 'the style of the Holy Roman church'. The following paragraphs owe much to Gem's paper.

On several occasions, Bede compares the Roman-style use of stone in building with the

Irish/Scottish use of wood. The most important of these references is when Nechtan, son of Derile, who ruled in southern Pictland in AD 706–24, wrote to Ceolfrith, abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, asking for guidance about the correct date of Easter. He also requested information about the correct form of the tonsure; and also that Ceolfrith should send master-masons to build a stone church in the Roman style (*architectos...qui iuxta morem Romanorum ecclesia de lapide in gente ipsius facerent*).

Evidently, the stone church was part of a much larger religious package which included a correct date for Easter and a correct form of tonsure. The church itself was to be dedicated in honour of the prince of apostles, that is, St Peter. Finally, Nechtan promised for himself and all his people always to follow the custom of the Holy Roman and Apostolic church, so far as they could in view of their remoteness from the Roman nation. In response, Ceolfrith sent the masons, and no doubt a church was built, probably between AD 709 and the death of Ceolfrith in 716 (*HE* v, 21). A suggestion that traces of that church can be seen in the west tower of the church at Restenneth dedicated to St Peter (Simpson 1963), has since been rejected by Fernie (1986, 397–400).

However that might be, it is clear that for Bede, as narrator of these events, the building of a stone church in the Roman style was essentially a sign of the acceptance of the supremacy of the Holy Roman church and its doctrines and customs; and correspondingly it marked the triumph over the false practices of the Irish and Columban church. Significantly, in AD 716, the Annals of Ulster record the ‘expulsion of the community of Iona across the spine of Britain (*Dorsum Britanniae*, Drumalban) by king Nechtan’.

Turning to Northumbria, Gem notes (1983, 3) the absence of ‘formal comparisons of more than minor significance...between Northumbrian churches and contemporary buildings in Rome’. He does however quote Stephen’s claim about Wilfrid’s church at Hexham that he (ie Stephen) had heard of no church built in such a manner north of the Alps (*VW*, 22); and without allowing for Stephen’s normally inflated praise of Wilfrid, Gem suggests that ‘this implies an Italian if not a Roman comparison’.

So far as actual early structures are concerned, however, the only significant remains are the crypts at Hexham and Ripon. Gem suggests that the catacombs at Rome itself, or possibly burial chambers such as the Hypogée des Dunes at Poitiers, might have been models for the crypts, though the Northumbrian examples would not have been formal copies of such structures.

To these, admittedly slender, comparisons we might add a further point in relation to architectural symbolism, namely, the masonry of these crypts. This consists of high quality ashlar, dressed in a Roman manner. It could well be that this was the work of masons imported by Wilfrid from Gaul. On the other hand, given the proximity of the Roman Wall, it is generally considered that the ashlar had been quarried from a Roman fort.

This is not impossible at Hexham and Ripon, and we have seen that it was certainly the case at Escomb, and very probably at Hoddum as well. But whether we are seeing the work of long-dead Roman soldiers or of newly imported Gaulish masons, we are presented with excellent examples of the great importance, in a Roman Christian context, of building *more Romanorum*, rather than in the manner of the Britons or the Irish/Scots.

A closer examination of Bede's comments on wooden, as opposed to stone, churches, reveals a curious ambivalence. We have seen that the first church in Northumbria had been speedily built of wood while Edwin was still a catechumen (*HE* ii, 14). In good Roman manner, it was dedicated to St Peter the Apostle. Another wooden church was probably erected in the time of Paulinus at Yeavering. Moreover, we can infer that Aidan, for whom Bede had great respect and sympathy, had at least one timber church somewhere near Bamburgh or Lindisfarne: this at least is the implication of the wooden buttress which had remained unburned when Penda destroyed the church and township (*HE* iii, 17).

The most interesting case, however, is that of Finan's church at Lindisfarne (*HE* iii, 25). On Aidan's death, Finan was consecrated on Iona and sent as bishop to Lindisfarne. There he built a church fit for a bishop's seat (*fecit ecclesiam episcopi sedi congruam*), which however was wholly built not of stone, but after the Irish/Scottish fashion of hewn oak, and thatched with reeds (*quam tamen more Scottorum non de lapide sed de robore secto totam composuit atque harundine texit*). This church, so totally alien to the Roman style, was subsequently dedicated in honour of St Peter the Apostle by a very 'Roman' person, namely Archbishop Theodore.

From this it would appear that, although Bede may have preferred that churches should be built in stone in the Roman manner, with all the implications which were spelt out in the case of Nechtan's church, timber could nonetheless be accepted as fitting for an episcopal seat. We may also recall that, in the years after the death of Bede (Whithorn Period II), if not indeed earlier, there were wooden churches at Whithorn (illus 73 above). It would appear that the choice of materials for building churches had none of the deep and bitter significance of other Roman/Irish differences.

The earliest church to have been built in Britain (other than those of Roman date) was, according to Bede, Ninian's church at Whithorn (*HE* iii, 4). This has been deliberately left out of the previous discussion, because it raises insoluble questions for the historian. We do not know Ninian's dates; but there is acceptable epigraphic evidence for Christian communities at Whithorn and the neighbouring Kirkmadrine around the middle of the 5th century (21.3.1 below), and this gives us a pointer—indeed the only pointer—to a date for Ninian's mission. This would be at least two and a half centuries before the composition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and there is no written evidence to bridge this gap.

The core of Bede's statement is that Ninian founded an episcopal see at a place which was commonly called 'At the White House' (*locus...vulgo vocatur Ad Candidam Casam*), because he built a church of stone. Taken literally, the phrase in Latin is nonsense, because it appears to imply that the common folk spoke Latin. So we must take it to mean 'the common folk call the place *Whitearn* or something like that, which may be put into Latin as *Ad Candidam Casam*'. But what was the actual vernacular name of this place? Bede's Latin form suggests that he was indeed translating an Old English name, probably *Æt Whitearn*, from which Whithorn itself is derived. But it is unbelievable that Old English was being spoken in the deep south-west as early as Ninian's day; the vernacular would have been Primitive Cumbric. What the precise form of the original place-name had been, and how it might have been transmitted to Bede, must remain mysteries. Moreover, the word *candidus* has qualitative meanings in addition to the simply descriptive white: for instance, shining, radiant, splendid.

Taking a deliberately minimal view, we may believe that, after the establishment of a Northumbrian episcopal seat at Whithorn, Bede learned of a tradition which associated a holy man of ancient times, by name Ninian, with a place which appeared to imply the former existence of a shining, or white, building. This may have been because it was plastered white externally; but beneath the plaster it may have been either of stone or of timber. Bede chose to believe that it had been of stone.

At this stage in writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede does not add 'in the Roman style'; nor does he invoke the kind of package which is spelt out in the letter of Nechtan to Ceolfrið. He does, however, make an even stronger claim for Ninian, that 'he had been regularly instructed at Rome in the faith and mysteries of the truth' (*erat Romae regulariter fidem et mysteria veritatis edoctus*). Moreover, the church which he founded was dedicated to the distinguished Roman bishop and saint, Martin.

None of this account of Ninian's instruction at Rome, or of the founding of a stone church, is demonstrably or necessarily true in the historical sense. Nevertheless, Bede created a powerful and lasting Roman Christian image for Whithorn.

Finally, we should notice that Bede provides an interesting, albeit minor instance of an iconographic interpretation of a standard feature of Anglo-Saxon churches, namely, the splayed window. In composing his 'allegorical exposition' of Solomon's Temple (Hurst 1969), he found in the Vulgate the expression *fecit...fenestras obliquas*, 'he made...oblique windows' (III Regum vi, 4). This Bede explained as windows that were 'wider on the inside', thus identifying them with the splayed windows with which he was fully familiar. It is quite irrelevant that the Hebrew original means merely 'narrow windows'. At the first level of symbolism, Bede, by equating the windows of Anglo-Saxon churches with those of Solomon's Temple is, as it were, claiming an Old Testament authority for them.

But Bede also discerned a deeper spiritual or allegorical level. Holy men of learning behold heavenly mysteries better than other men. When they reveal these mysteries to the faithful, they may be compared to windows which, having caught the light of the sun, fill all the recesses of the temple. 'Therefore', he concludes, 'they are well said to have been oblique windows'. Starting as it does from the well-observed natural phenomenon of the spreading of sunshine through a splayed window, this develops as a remarkable spiritual interpretation. For the modern reader, it likewise throws a flood of light on the medieval mentality (Alcock 1974).

#### 17.4.2 Churches in the Irish tradition

We must now turn from the iconography of churches built *more Romanorum* to those in the Irish tradition (Edwards 1990, 114-21, with figs 54-5). Here we have to deal with the iconography not so much of the architecture of religious buildings as of their context, setting or environment. A commonly-held image here would be that of the monastery of Skellig Michael, a pyramidal rock some 8 miles (13km) off the Kerry coast, which rises to some 218m (714ft) above sea-level. Between a terrace at about 168m (550ft) and the summit are several beehive cells, three tiny churches and a graveyard.

This spectacular site is an extreme example, but there are some 30 islands with eremitic and early church remains on the western seaboard of Ireland (information from J O'Sullivan). In northern Britain, these find echoes for instance at Eileach an Naoimh in the Garvellachs and at Sgor nam Ban-Naomha on Canna (illus 112; 113). The remote-

ness and ruggedness of these monasteries symbolize concepts of pilgrimage, and above all of renunciation, which go back to the Desert Fathers of the early centuries of Christianity. They were also enthusiastically received by many Celtic, and especially Irish or Irish-trained, monks in the 6th and later centuries.

An especially compelling set of ideas was that of a sea journey to an island. This was one of the attractions of Iona. The actual environment there was far removed from the natural hostility of Skellig Michael or Eileach an Naomh; but for Columba, a major act of renunciation had been involved in leaving his family, lands, and all the associations of his former life in northern Ireland. In greater or lesser degree, other members of the Ionan community and other religious communities made similar renunciations, frequently symbolized by a sea journey to an island (Sharpe 1995, 12 and *refff.*).

The same symbolism is to be seen in Bernicia. On Oswald's accession to the kingdom of Northumbria, he requested a bishop from Iona, and Aidan was sent in response. The king donated the island of Lindisfarne for the episcopal see, at Aidan's own request. Bede emphasises the fact that the place was cut off by the tide twice a day (*HE* iii, 3); but nonetheless it could hardly qualify as remote, since it was in view from the Northumbrian coast, as well as from the royal stronghold of Bamburgh. Moreover, on the island itself, in addition to the monastery, was the royal township of *Broninis*, where bishop Wilfrid was imprisoned by king Ecgfrith (*VW*, 36).

It may have been such circumstances as these which inspired Cuthbert, when in later years he became prior and subsequently bishop of Lindisfarne, to seek a more remote retreat. Cuthbert had been trained at Melrose, a monastery with a strongly Irish ethos. On Lindisfarne he developed the custom of retreating to an islet, not more than 60m (65yds) across, to spend his time in prayer and fasting. The islet, however, was only about 200m (218yds) off shore, and was overlooked by the monastery itself.

Cuthbert then moved to Farne Island, where he created an outstanding icon of the Irish ideal of *peregrinatio* (Herity 1989; Sharpe 1995, *passim*). The island, which is about 1.5 miles (2.4km) from the Bernician coast, has a largely rocky surface, though Cuthbert was able to raise a barley crop so that he could lead a totally independent life. He built an enclosing wall and by digging out earth and rock in the interior and building up round the perimeter, he ensured that he could see only the sky, so that his mind was lifted to higher things (*VCB*, XVII-XX).

Within the enclosure were an oratory and a dwelling; and by a miracle, he was granted a permanent source of water. Beside the landing place he also built a guest house. Reading this, we are reminded of the layout on Church Island, Co Kerry (O'Kelly 1958; Edwards 1990, fig 54c), but the scale is quite different. The Irish enclosure is perhaps four times the extent of Cuthbert's, the one perhaps a proprietary church serving a community (Ó Corráin 1981b, 339-40), the other a simple hermit's cell.

In the biographies of Cuthbert, parallels with the Desert Fathers were emphasized. Before Cuthbert could occupy the island, he had first to drive out the Evil One and his satellites. Despite this, he had to do continual battle with demons, as did St Antony, the first of the Desert Fathers. Like Antony, he also had friendly, but commanding, relations with wild animals. Thus, he drove away the birds which had been taking his crops, as Antony had restrained the wild asses which had been harming his garden (*VCB*, XIX). This, of course, is hagiographical truth, not historical reality, for Bede is partly basing

his account of Cuthbert on the Evagrian Life of Antony (Colgrave 1940, 351). For us, the interest is that it was possible on Farne Island to match the physical facts—the setting and the structures—with the mentality of *peregrinatio*.

### 17.4.3 East mediterranean models and influences

One other religious artefact from northern Britain deserves iconographic status, namely the book *De locis sanctis*, Of the Holy Places, compiled by Adomnán, abbot of Iona, probably in AD 683–6 (D Meehan 1958). This deals with a quite different kind of pilgrimage, that to the Holy Land, and especially to Jerusalem. In this instance, the pilgrimage had been undertaken, apparently around 679–82, by a Gaulish bishop called Arculf. On his return journey, possibly heading for northern Gaul, his ship was wrecked on the western shores of Britain, whence Arculf eventually arrived at Iona (*HE* v, 15). These are the only details we have about what must have been a remarkable chain of circumstances: indeed, we might apply the term fortunate, if not actually miraculous, to them.

For at Iona, Adomnán was then abbot, and he persuaded Arculf to give him an account of the Holy Places, which he wrote down. Shortly afterwards, Adomnán presented a copy of this to king Aldfrith of Deira. Moreover, Bede produced two chapters of summary for the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*HE* v, 16–17). Far more important, Aldfrith had further copies made, which were disseminated not merely in Britain but widely in Europe. Most importantly, Arculf provided annotated plans of a number of churches, including the Anastasis Church, or Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and its surroundings, the church of the Ascension and that at Jacob's well at Sichem, and the basilica on Mount Sion. Versions of these plans circulated with many copies. Here, then, was a widely disseminated account of a number of churches of major significance for Christian communities.

Krautheimer, in his original introduction to the concept of an iconography of architecture (1971), made several comments on the *De locis sanctis*. One is simple enough: Arculf illustrates the church at the well of Jacob as having four narrow arms of equal length 'in the likeness of a cross', *quasi in similitudinem crucis*. Krautheimer points out that several different shapes might serve to symbolize the victory of Christ and the Cross (*ibid*, 121).

A more complex theme concerns the copying of significant buildings, such as the Anastasis church in Jerusalem. This church is one of which Arculf provided what looks like a detailed and credible plan. But both in the plan and his description, he shows the rotunda supports as consisting only of twelve pillars, whereas there are also four double piers. Two different sets of significant numbers meet in the actual building. At the simplest, they can be expressed as twelve for the twelve apostles; and four, which is a cross, times two, giving the significant number eight. It would not be possible to use Arculf's plan to construct a faithful copy of the Anastasis rotunda, and as Krautheimer shows (1971, 117–8), both the twelve and the eight supports may be found in medieval churches which were claimed as copies. Here, as elsewhere among the artefacts of the Early Christian period, it is the symbol, not the literal accuracy, which is what matters in architectural iconography.

## PART FIVE

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### ARTS, CRAFTS & MORE PEACEFUL PURSUITS

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**T**he earlier parts of this study have looked at the kings, warriors and priests of our title. In this final section we turn to the craftsmen whose works have underpinned their activities and run as a thread through the sites which we have been observing.

In our period of interest, the artist worked chiefly in metal, stone, and vellum (though we should not forget the more perishable materials: wood and textiles). Present-day knowledge and perceptions of the products of the three materials differ widely from those contemporary with their production. Carving in stone had produced public monuments, accessible to all from lord to peasant. Much fine metalwork was reserved for the service of the church, but in a secular context it would have been seen on the arms or breast of warriors and their womenfolk, especially in the hall, or whenever they went out riding. Works on vellum, by contrast, were chiefly in the form of psalters and Gospel books, and were reserved for actual liturgical purposes. For the most part, only their covers of board, leather, or metal might have been seen laid on the altar; but significant pages might have been displayed to the congregation in church, or in religious processions (Meehan 1994, 29).

Today, by contrast, developments in inexpensive colour photography and printing have made the decorated holy books accessible to all. Certainly they may be seen and appreciated by tens of thousands. The fine metalwork is normally housed in museums, where it may—or may not—be displayed in an accessible and intelligible manner. In addition, some of the more striking pieces have been widely published in picture-books; but even the best of illustrations cannot equal the experience of seeing the artefacts in use and actually handling them. Of the carvings in stone, many have been destroyed by human or natural forces; others have been preserved by burial in museum vaults. Fortunately, some of the greatest may still be seen in their original physical setting, by those able to make pilgrimages to often obscure places. As for appreciating the sculptures, as well as the metalwork and holy books, in their original conceptual setting, one objective of these chapters is to explore approaches to the inner meaning and oblique significance of the artefacts which will be described. Examples of such approaches have already been cited in the Prologue.



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## ARTS & CRAFTS, TYPOLOGY & HISTORY

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### 18.1 INSULAR ART-HISTORY AND ITS OBJECTIVES

The visual arts, and other forms of craftsmanship—probably inseparable concepts in the early historic period—provide a large part of the material or archaeological evidence for our study, at any rate in quantitative terms. They are central to cultural studies and, by extension, are of major importance in any social analysis. It has rightly been said (by a distinguished student of written evidence) that ‘objects provide some direct evidence which the historical texts rarely, if ever, give. One wants to know how things were made; also by whom, if possible where, and with what purpose’ (Hughes 1972, 251).

Many of these objects, such as richly-ornamented jewellery, or pictorial sculptures, appear to be immediately accessible to modern eyes and minds. But the appearance of accessibility is misleading. This introductory chapter, therefore, sets out some of the problems, and introduces some of the academic procedures which attempt to resolve them. Some parts of the chapter may seem unduly critical and negative; but the purpose is a positive one: to establish the fundamental value of an appreciation of the Insular arts and crafts to our understanding of contemporary society.

While it is not my intention to deal comprehensively with the art-history of northern Britain, it is none the less desirable to outline some of the accepted scholarly approaches and methodologies, because an understanding of these will provide a basis for examining the relevance of the arts to social activities and mentalities. Following a description of the flowering of Insular art, three chief objectives will be pursued: first, to recognize the introduction of exotic, or at least, non-Insular, images and motifs, and to trace their establishment and acceptance in an Insular framework; second, to make comparisons, and to seek parallels or analogies within the body of Insular art itself; and third, to determine chronologies.

#### 18.1.1 The flowering of Insular art

In the last three or four centuries BC, the Celts of the two islands, no less than their European cousins, had created a vibrant and dynamic art, especially in fine metalwork. In both the shape of objects—brooches, torcs, shields, scabbards—and their surface ornament, they produced forms and designs which were fluid but disciplined, abstract and curvilinear. These were often further embellished with colour, especially the red of coral or enamel.

On the Continent, after the Roman conquest of Gaul, Celtic art was largely overlaid by Classical. In Britain, the techniques of casting and enamelling survived, but with some rare exceptions the forms became enfeebled. It might be thought that this was because the Heroic Celtic society which had commissioned earlier works had been suppressed. But this cannot explain a similar enfeeblement in Ireland.

Whatever the reasons for the decline had been, from the later 4th century AD the first buds appeared of what was to be a great new florescence. One stem of this was the elaboration of a type of brooch—the penannular—of which the history went back into the pre-Roman centuries. Another was the ornamentation of the suspension hooks of hanging-bowls of ultimately Roman origin. On these, and other objects, both in Ireland and Britain, there was a new blossoming of techniques—casting, incising, enamelling—and of motifs—peltae, triquetras, scrolls, trumpets, and animal- and bird-heads—which had been largely dormant, but never extinct, during the Roman centuries. (From a vast literature, special mention should be made of Macgregor 1976; Kilbride-Jones 1980; Youngs 1989; with the caution that, in a period when chronologies are ineluctably fluid, Kilbride-Jones dates too early, and Youngs too late).

This Celtic flowering was remarkable enough; but it was then reinforced by Germanic influences. The metalwork of the early Anglo-Saxon settlers, as of their north European ancestors, was technically competent, but its motifs, largely of animal heads and disintegrated bodies, were visually boring (it may, however, have had great magical and amuletic significance: see Leigh 1984). But around the turn of the 6th and 7th century, a new package of motifs, termed *Animal Style II*, appeared on the continent and was quickly adopted in England. In simple terms, this reintegrated the individual animal, but elongated its body and limbs into ribbon- and filament-like elements, which lent themselves to twisting into spirals, or interlacing with similar animals.

It was probably the sinuous, curvilinear elements in Germanic Style II which appealed to Celtic artists in Britain and Ireland, and which led to the cross-fertilization of Celtic and Germanic aesthetics, producing a recognisable insular style. One further element was that of interlace, which may have come ultimately from the Mediterranean. The result was an extraordinary burgeoning of artistic perception, invention and imagination, which Wilson has indeed called 'The seventh-century explosion' (1984, Chap 2). This was supported by the technical skills to realize new imaginative concepts, especially in filigree-work and cloisonné using both enamel and coloured stones. The inventiveness and skills of smiths were fully matched by those of the decorators of Gospel books. The products of the florescence were the objects which caused Giraldus Cambrensis to remark: 'all these things must have been the result of the work, not of men, but of angels' (cited in Youngs 1989, 4).

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Sutton Hoo, the  
great gold buckle  
(*British Museum*).

A leading example of animal motifs is represented by the great gold buckle (illus 114) from the royal boat burial at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk (Bruce-Mitford, 1978, 536-564;

Evans. 1986, 88-9, pl vii). This is, of course, strictly outside the geographical range of this book, but it admirably represents the Insular skills in decorated metalwork among both the Angles and the Celts. Two other characteristic examples, combining ribbon-like animals and stylized eagles' heads are represented by mounts from lyres or harps from graves at Taplow and Sutton Hoo (col illus I.5).

Looking at Insular art as a whole, we should accept that it is wrong to attempt to assign Celtic or Germanic labels to indi-



vidual motifs on any particular piece. From a modern point of view, of course, this may seem an appropriate and relevant distinction. But from a contemporary viewpoint, the object may have been created by a single craftsman, or at least in a single workshop and for a single patron, who was unlikely to be aware of its mixed stylistic ancestry. It is not difficult to imagine a brooch of ultimately Irish form, embellished with both Celtic and Germanic motifs, being made in a Scottic workshop in a part of Dál Riata which was politically under Pictish control at the time. Hence the value of the comprehensive term, 'Insular' (for examples, see 19.2 below).



This brief survey of the florescence of Insular art has so far omitted another major element in the art of the period: namely, figure-representation, both in painting and in sculpture. For the origins of painting, we may point to the board with a painted likeness of Christ which Augustine and his fellow-monks carried on their first meeting with king Æthelbert (*HE* i, 25). We have, indeed, a 6th-century Italian Gospel book, 'which is by tradition thought to have accompanied St Augustine on his mission to England' (Webster & Brown 1997, 234 with pl 30). In this, the Gospel of St Luke opens with a portrait of the evangelist, flanked by miniatures of scenes from his Gospel (col illus II.1).

From the later 7th and early 8th centuries, we have direct evidence from both Stephen and Bede for the travels of ecclesiastics in Gaul and the Mediterranean, sometimes, as was certainly the case with Benedict Biscop, with the express purpose of bringing back ornaments, images and holy relics. Many, perhaps most, of these would have been paintings, but it is difficult to believe that there were no images in relief among them, which might also have inspired Insular imitation.

### 18.1.2 Exotica: the impact of Christian imagery

When Augustine and his fellow missionaries arrived in Kent in AD 597, the Celtic peoples of Britain—as we have seen—were beginning to absorb Germanic art styles, and in particular animal motifs. From Augustine's arrival, of course, the whole package of Christian ideas and iconography was introduced: a package which included stories and doctrinal concepts from the Old and New Testaments, as well as from the Early Christian Fathers—in short, from both Western Asiatic and Mediterranean sources. Already the first missionaries processed with a silver cross as their standard and an image of Christ painted on a board (*HE* i, 25). Over the following century, such icons and liturgical objects were multiplied by gifts from popes to kings (*HE* i, 32), and above all by religious artefacts of many kinds brought back from the Continent, from Rome and the Mediterranean, and even occasionally from the Holy Land itself, by abbots and bishops like Benedict and Wilfrid. This was a rich treasure of exotica to choose from, to adopt, and to modify. Here, two iconographic examples may demonstrate briefly how eclectically the treasure was received.

The first example is that of the Old Testament story which we know as 'Jonah and the whale', though the Vulgate calls the creature a 'great fish', and none of the icons shows it as anything like a biological whale. Normally the creature has a dragon- or lion-like head, forelegs with claws, a serpentine body and a fish-tail; to these attributes, an early example (c AD 285) even adds wings (Milburn 1988, 80-2 with fig 50). For Christians the story foretold Christ's Entombment (the swallowing of Jonah) and his Resurrection (the disgorging), with its precious promise for the Redemption of mankind (*Encyclopaedia*, 449-50 with figs 174-5). Depictions of the story are found already in



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Cross-slab from  
Fowlis Wester:  
above, Jonah and  
the sea monster;  
below, the Desert  
Fathers.

the catacombs, perhaps as early as the beginning of the 3rd century, and become common on Mediterranean sarcophagi in the 3rd and 4th centuries (Milburn 1988, 62-3). They also appear, more relevantly for us, on portable objects such as ivory reliquary caskets (Webster 1982, fig 26a). Frequently there is a balanced composition: on the one side, the sailors throw Jonah head first into the creature's jaws; on the other side he emerges, again head first.

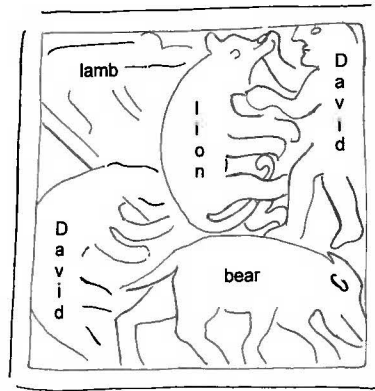
A version of the double incident appears on a Pictish cross stele from Fowlis Wester, with interesting variations on the standard iconography (Curle 1940, pl XXVII b; Sutherland 1994, 151; here illus 115). The creature has a carnivore's head, jaws and ear, but no forelegs; a truly fish-like, not serpentine, body; but a curly, not fish-like, tail. To the viewer's left, all but Jonah's legs have been swallowed. To the right, he emerges feet and body first, *contra* the standard icon, and his head is still in the fish's jaws. Apart from these modifications to the received icon, there is a major addition. In the left-hand image, the fish has failed to swallow Jonah's sword and shield. Appropriately for Pictish society, Jonah was perceived as a noble warrior rather than as a prophet. Alongside the stem of the cross at Fowlis Wester there is an angel, and two clerics are seated against a background of palm trees. These probably represent the Desert Fathers of the early 4th century AD.

From Jonah we turn to David, foreteller of the Jewish Messiah, and therefore of Christ himself. His varied and colourful life, from shepherd-boy, through slayer of Goliath, to king of Israel, provided Early Christian and Medieval artists with a wide range of images. Some of these found great favour in Insular circles, though curiously there is no explicit image of the slaying of Goliath, despite its message of the triumph of good over evil.

In both Northumbria and Scotland, David themes were depicted in both decorated manuscripts and sculpture (see 7.1.3 above). For the first, the example comes from a massive commentary on the Psalms, written by the Italian Cassiodorus. The English version was written in Northumbria, probably at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow. Of the two remaining illuminated pages (probably out of three), one shows David as a victorious warrior, trampling on a double-headed monster, significant for both Old Testament and early Christian iconography (col illus II.15). The other page shows David, seated on a throne (illus 116a), playing a lyre to comfort King Saul and to drive out an evil spirit (I Samuel, 16:23) (commentary in Bailey 1978; see also 20.4).



116a  
Images of David:  
David depicted  
playing a lyre, on  
the Durham copy  
of the Cassiodorus  
commentary of the  
Psalms (*Dean and  
Chapter of  
Durham*).



116b  
Images of David:  
Detail from the  
Dupplin cross  
(with explanatory  
diagram): above,  
David rescuing a  
lamb (top left)  
from a lion; below,  
David smiting a  
bear (*National  
Museums of  
Scotland*).

Among the sculptors of the Picts, and occasionally on the Scottish Islands, a popular motif is of David rescuing his father's lamb from a lion, or rarely from a bear; but except on the St Andrews sarcophagus (see 23.2.2, below), it is never a dominant motif (illus 116b). The origin of this icon is in the Old Testament (I Samuel 17, 32-54); but the resonances for the New Testament were also profound (Alcock 1995b).

From such instances it is evident that the Insular artists were not merely copiers of received images: they were prepared to choose, modify or reject motifs in accordance with their own ideas.

### 18.1.3 Insular classifications, comparisons, relationships

In the scholarly study of Insular art, considerable academic activity is devoted to defining and classifying images, and more particularly decorative patterns and motifs. A classic example of this, Allen & Anderson's *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (ECMS), first published in 1903, is still the only corpus and systematic discussion of the material. Part II of this is largely devoted to a formal analysis of the cross-forms and the decorative designs upon them, in which 65% of the volume (pp 129-403) is a classification of abstract interlace patterns. By contrast, the sculptured images of human and animal figures, of great artistic and iconographic significance, are merely listed (pp 405-13).

#### Interlace

It is true that Allen's classification proves a convenience in Part III, where the interlace patterns can simply be referred to by type-number, leaving the text free for scale illustrations and detailed descriptions of the figural sculpture. But though the space given to interlace in Part II might suggest that such ornament was of major importance to the sculptors and their patrons, there is no discussion as to the character and inspiration of that importance. It should be added that recent scholars have found Allen's classification too complicated, and it has now been superseded by a simpler one (Adcock 1978; Cramp 1984a). There appears, however, to have been no critical discussion as to why

interlace designs were so popular in sculpture, metalwork, and manuscript decoration.

Allen's classification of interlace represents an extreme example of the relative sterility of such formal categorisation. It is obvious, however, that by the very use of words we are grouping artefacts into classes: firstly by recognizing them as artefacts, then as, for example, weapons and then as, for example, swords, spears, shields and so forth. But subsequently, from classes which use an everyday vocabulary, it becomes necessary for the archaeologist and art-historian to use groupings which are subject-specific, with their own appropriate vocabularies.

As the number of known examples in any one group increases, increasingly refined classifications may become possible, demanding correspondingly refined groupings. Comparisons between and within such sub-groups may make it possible to place individual artefacts within both temporal and spatial frames. From such exercises, historical and social hypotheses may then be inferred.

### A case-study in categorisation: penannular brooches

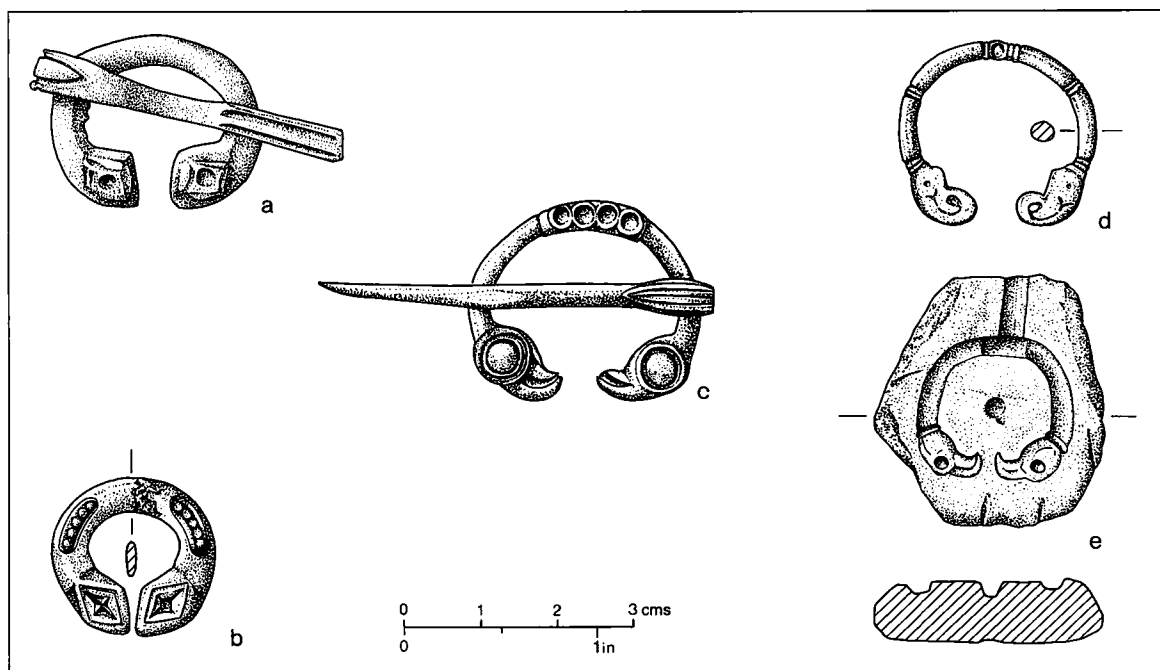
A useful demonstration of this process, because of its relative simplicity, is given by a study of the form and distribution of a group of brooches classed as 'penannular'. Among the large number of these, an important sub-group is classed as 'type G'. This is further divided into several small groups of which 'types G1 to G4 do represent real non-random clusterings' (Dickinson 1982, 43). This analysis is of considerable relevance in the present study because, out of some 58 examples in Britain and Ireland, 18 have been found north of the Tyne-Solway line. Of those, only two belong to type G1, which is widely spread further south, whereas types G2 to G4 are characteristic of the north.

In more detail, types G2 to G4 are found in south-west Scotland, the Scottish mainland west of Drumalban, and the Western Isles. Relevant to their place of manufacture is the occurrence of moulds at Mote of Mark (Kirkcudus) and Dunadd (Argyll). The distribution also extends into northern Ireland, where another five examples of G3 have been found. In addition to the distributional difference, it seems that the southern examples belong to the 4th(?) to 6th centuries, whereas the northern ones fall in the 7th to 9th centuries. These generalizations are not affected by the publication, in 1992, of two brooches, one each of type G1 and G2 from a cemetery at Norton in Cleveland, which neatly fill the gap between the southern and northern distributions (Sherlock & Welch 1992, 40-1; here illus 117).

Another recent recognition of the wide distribution of a very distinctive class of penannular brooches, in this case with opposed birds' heads (ultimately a Germanic motif), comes from excavations at Dunadd. Examples spread to Clough, Co Antrim, and Sewerby, East Yorks—this last in silver (Campbell & Lane 1993, 54-5; here illus 117).

In the case of the type G penannular brooches, it was simple to demonstrate the methodology of comparing and classifying rather similar objects—in short, typology—because the brooches were of simple form, and bore only the plainest of ornamentation. But most of the metalwork of our period was decorated with diverse and complicated patterns, which lend themselves to extremely subtle analysis.

The chief cause of this diversity was the fusion of Celtic curvilinear art, Germanic Style II animals, and Mediterranean interlace already mentioned. In particular, the flexibility



of ribbon-bodies, plus the even greater potential flexibility of attenuated limbs, to say nothing of tongues, tails and lappets, led to an astounding proliferation of animal patterns and zoomorphic interlace. It might be expected that the flexibility was greatest in the case of pen and brush designs in decorated manuscripts; but even in metalwork, fine beaded wire, filigree, and even fine engraved or cast lines displayed astounding complexity and delicacy. And on a larger—although not therefore coarser—scale, the fine-grained sandstone of eastern Scotland enabled the Picts to carve equally complicated patterns.



The proliferation of designs differing in greater or lesser detail has made it possible to create very refined comparisons and classifications, and this in turn has engendered a highly specialized field of scholarship, competent to pursue such comparisons at great lengths.

One particular point is worth pursuing here. Study of the motifs on an Anglo-Saxon helmet from Coppergate, York (illus 50 above), has revealed comparisons ranging from southern England to northern Britain and beyond to Ireland, the Shetland Isles and Scandinavia (Tweddle 1992). Except in the case of Scandinavia, whence Insular metalwork may have been brought by Viking raiders, we may wonder how relationships can have come about over such distances. To take a second example, that of a highly ornamental gilt-bronze boss found at Steeple Bumpstead in Essex (Smith 1916): the latest discussion of this concludes 'that its affinities confirm that the boss was made in Ireland', most likely in the first half of the 8th century (Young 1993). Its appearance in eastern Britain should cause no surprise, however, if its purpose has been correctly identified as intended 'to decorate a reliquary or other item of church furniture', for the mobility of Irish clerics is well documented in historical accounts.

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Penannular brooches and mould: penannular Class G2 brooches from Castlehill, Ayrshire (a) and from Norton, grave 40 (b); eagle-headed brooches, from Clough, Co Antrim (c) and Sewerby, E Yorks (d); mould for eagle-headed brooch (e) from Dunadd, Argyll.

The difficulty in comprehending how long-range relationships in art motifs might have occurred arises because today we possess only a microscopically small sample of the original metalwork. We need to think in terms of a Britain covered in kingdoms and sub-kingdoms, and estates both secular and religious, within which potentates of various ranks were constantly circulating on progresses: potentates who bore with them fine metalwork, arms, jewellery, or liturgical objects. Moreover, each major centre, whether lay or ecclesiastical, would have its own workshops. Evidently, instead of a map of scattered dots representing comparable art-motifs, we should think in terms of a continuous network for the exchange of patterns and ideas.

#### 18.1.4 Chronology

One objective underlying the search for external sources and internal comparisons is to provide a framework for the systematic dating of artefacts and monuments, that is to say, to establish both relative and absolute chronologies. In the period of this study, there is little to help us in the way of dated inscriptions, including coins, which are of great assistance in other periods. Nor are the available scientific dating methods of use: radio-carbon dating is normally too coarse; and few wooden buildings have yielded suitable samples for tree-ring dating, which in favourable circumstances can date a timber building to the nearest year. We should note also the discrepancy between radiocarbon and dendrochronological dating revealed at Buiston crannog (Chap 16 above).

In default of other methods, we must fall back upon dating by reference to historically-known persons and events. These methods have their own problems, as may be demonstrated by an examination of two classic examples of great relevance to northern Britain, in which extensive systems have been based on foundations of doubtful soundness.

#### Dating of the Lindisfarne Gospels

The first example, that of the Lindisfarne Gospels, is at the very heart of the development of book decoration and other artistic achievements in the north. Indeed, its date should provide a major chronological peg not only for manuscripts, but also for fine metalwork, and even for interlace ornament on sculpture.

There is indeed no contemporary evidence either for the date of its composition or for the name (or names) of its scribe and illuminator. But around the middle of the 10th century, and perhaps two-and-a-half centuries after the composition of the Gospels, a translation into Old English was written, line by line, into the Latin text (accessible in Backhouse 1981, 7). The translator, a priest called Aldred, added a colophon or tail-piece naming those whom he believed had executed the original work: Eadfrith, bishop of Lindisfarne as scribe, Ethelwald who made the cover, Billfrith who adorned it with gems. Of these, the most important for the date is Eadfrith, who is known to have become bishop of Lindisfarne in AD 698.

In general, the colophon has indeed been accepted as sound historical evidence, perhaps with some supporting comment about oral tradition, or a now-lost inscription on the outer cover of the Gospels. But such comments ignore almost two decades of development in historical criticism, beginning with Dumville's seminal paper (1977) on history and legend in sub-Roman Britain. More recently he has affirmed the principle that 'history must be written from contemporary sources or with the aid of testimony carried

to a later era by an identifiable and acceptable line of transmission'. This view has been endorsed by another competent scholar of the Early Historic period, reviewing Dumville's 1993 collection of essays (Kirby 1994). There is little support here for the view that we can accept the Lindisfarne colophon as a statement of historical fact, and use it as a basis for dating an important phase in Insular art.

### Pictish stone dating

The second case to be examined has its origin in statements found in several versions of the Scottish Regnal Lists, that Kenneth, son of Alpín, destroyed the Picts and led the Scots out of Argyll into the land of the Picts (Anderson 1980, 266-7; 273-4). A date in the mid-9th century may be inferred. This dramatic military and political event is held to have been responsible also for major social changes, such as the extinction of the Pictish language, and the suppression of the distinctive symbols which had characterized the two earlier phases (Classes I & II) of sculptured stones in eastern Scotland (details below, 21.4, 22.2). The first enunciation of this in a discussion of Pictish sculpture was probably that by CL Curle in 1940: 'With the establishment of the dynasty of the Scots in 850, Pictish culture must have merged with that of the Scots, and all that was most characteristic gradually disappeared' (1940, 105).

In simplified art-historical terms, sculptures without the characteristic 'Pictish' symbols have been regarded as post-Kenneth's invasion, and have been assigned to Class III. This view has been broadly endorsed over the following half-century: for instance, by Stevenson (1955, 122), and Henderson (1975b, 11). In 1978, however, there appeared a far more subtle analysis of both political developments between the Picts and the Scots, and of the sculpture of eastern Scotland in the 9th and 10th centuries (Henderson 1978).

The belief that carved stones in Pictland lacking 'Pictish' symbols must be dated after Kenneth's invasion was decisively disproved in 1992, with the discovery of a hitherto unnoticed inscription on a long-known cross at Dupplin, Perthshire. Dr Katherine Forsyth was able to read the first three words as CUSTANTIN FILIUS FIRCUS. 'It is tempting', she wrote, 'to identify this [inscription] as a reference to Custantin (ie Constantine) son of Fergus (or Wuirguist). He assumed the kingship of Pictland in AD 789, and that of Dalriada by 811' (Forsyth 1992; 1995). He died in 819/820. Although the rest of the inscription is too weathered to be read, it may be concluded that, because Custantin's name stands at its head, he was the subject of a sentence which may have continued 'erected this cross/monument...'.

In other words, we have here a cross with a good historical date erected *c* AD 820. But it bears no Pictish symbols; and moreover the principal figures—a royal horseman and his foot-soldiers—are stiffer than those commonly found on the Pictish Class II stones, which are assigned to the 8th and earlier 9th centuries. The Dupplin cross is indeed a characteristic Class III stone in terms of the received classification. We can only conclude that some Class III stones do antedate the conventional AD 850 boundary; but this is not to say that the carving of crosses with Pictish symbols ceased around 820. And there is the further caveat, that we should be cautious about linking artistic developments to dynastic changes.

The moral of these two case studies is, then, that we can expect from available historical sources no clear and firm marker-dates, from which we might establish horizons or close brackets for changing art-styles. Eighty, or even 50 years ago, students of

Continental and Insular metalwork, or Insular manuscripts, expected to establish half-century, or even notional generation (ie 30-year) brackets for artwork. Recent scholars are not always more cautious. Dates stated initially in half-centuries are frequently refined in terms of 'probably within the second quarter'. For a historian, however, there are few acceptable grounds for such refinements.

## 18.2 TOWARDS A SOCIAL HISTORY OF INSULAR ART

Arnold Hauser's monumental study, *The social history of art* (1989), first published in 1951, is disappointingly weak on Hiberno-Saxon or Insular art. His accounts of both Irish and Germanic society in the Migration Period were already sadly out of date in the 1950s. In keeping with earlier chapters in which he makes much of comparisons and contrasts between poetry and the graphic arts, he has some interesting remarks about the lively nature poetry of the Irish; but he shows no awareness of the heroic poetry of the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons and its relevance both to fine metalwork and to our understanding of society. No less serious is his ignorance of Insular, and especially Pictish, sculpture, which leads him to condemn Insular artists for their abandonment of any attempt to give bodily substance to the human figure (Hauser 1989, 128).

In default of well-informed and sympathetic discussions within larger works of synthesis, it seems desirable to outline the approaches to a social context for Insular art which are followed, especially in Part Five, and more widely throughout this book as a whole.

### 18.2.1 Interrogating the evidence

Firstly, despite the critical comments made in the previous section, it is accepted that the typological analyses—in the widest sense of 'typology'—of the art-historian are a necessary preliminary to an understanding of the social history of art. But—and it is a large 'but'—such analyses should not be an end in themselves. This is indeed often recognized, though in muted terms, when scholars who specialize in art-history move into wider fields of history.

Secondly, the following procedures should be adopted when studying the remains of the arts and crafts of the past:

- 1 the evidence—that is, the remains, whether material or verbal—must not be received passively, but must be interrogated in order to reveal the intentions, motives, and perceptions of those who had originally commissioned, executed, used or merely gazed at works of art or craft;
- 2 the results of this interrogation must then form the basis for learning about contemporary social and political structures and mentalities.

The aim of this interrogation should be to generate an understanding of the messages encoded in sculpture, in manuscripts, and even in decorative metalwork. This understanding should be at three levels. Firstly the iconography: who are the actors, what is the event? Ideally, for the centuries of our period, this requires some knowledge at least of the Old and New Testaments and the writings of the Desert Fathers; and also of Celtic and Germanic mythology.

Secondly, the iconology: what is the inner hidden meaning of the iconography. As a simple instance we may take the readily identifiable scene of David rescuing one of his father's lambs from a marauding lion. The inner meanings or references here include David as foreteller of Christ; the lamb as the Passover lamb of the Jews; and for Christians, Christ himself as the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice; but also sheep as representing the whole flock of Christian believers (Alcock 1995b).

Deep interpretations may also be discovered in secular scenes, especially the Christian interpretations of hunting and riding. We saw in the Prologue possible interpretations of the hunting of a deer with dogs: the stag may represent sinners, so the purpose of the hunt is their conversion; or the stag may represent the Christian seeking salvation, or even Christ himself, while the dogs are the hounds of Hell, driven on by hunter-devils (Bailey 1977).

Thirdly, the question must be asked: what was the level of perception and understanding of the mass of ordinary peasants, the *vulgaris turba*, crowd of common folk, to use Bede's term (VCB, 162-3). Unlike the illuminated manuscripts, the sculptured stones were in the public domain, and may well have been intended as preaching places for the promulgation of the Christian faith. We shall see (22 below) that some of the images appear to have been deliberately chosen to arouse the immediate interest of the untutored viewer—notably, of course, those of David as shepherd. Once the attention had been seized, it would be possible to unfold the full religious significance. This is far removed from the view that the frequent riding and hunting scenes were commissioned by the nobility in order to impress their superiority over the common folk, and thus, in neo-Marxist terminology, to 'legitimate' their status.

These interrogatory procedures may not always be explicit. To pursue them is to reject the currently fashionable theory that the only role of the historian is to invent the past. In opposition to that view, emphasis is placed on the recovery of the past from the evidence of its remains. Appropriate use is made of the formal analysis of sources, parallels, styles, typologies and chronologies as tools towards the stated objectives. But it is necessary to avoid concentrating so narrowly on formal methodology as to be deflected from essentially humanist interpretations.

### 18.2.2 The social role of art and artists

This statement of objectives may usefully be followed by a discussion of some general aspects of the social role and significance of Insular artists and their products in the Early Historic period.

It would be of great social interest to know how much esteem was enjoyed by different kinds of artist, and what value was placed on their works. The second question would be particularly difficult to answer in a region and period when coinage was virtually unknown. Hauser makes an interesting comparison in the Greco-Roman world between the high respect enjoyed by a poet on the one hand, and the lowly worth of a sculptor or painter on the other (Hauser 1989, 102-3). In brief, the sculptor and painter were manual workers who received a wage, whereas the poet was an inspired word-smith who received gifts from his patron-friend.

There is no doubt that this estimation would have been echoed by the Early Historic Insular bards. Taliesin makes this abundantly clear with his anticipation of gifts of horses,

robes, arm-rings, brooches, a sword, from Cynan Garwyn (*CT*, I; Pennar 1988, 42–6). It is difficult, however, to find corresponding evidence for the rewards of armourers and jewel-smiths, who were not articulate in immortal verse.

Some artefacts which today we might regard as major works of art would not expect any earthly reward, because they were made for the glory of God: above all decorated Gospel books, liturgical vessels and other ecclesiastical objects such as reliquaries and processional crosses. The Gospels would have been written and decorated in monastic *scriptoria*, and some at least of the metalwork would probably have been fashioned in workshops within the monastic enclosure. All this would have been accomplished by men of religion of various ranks, who were maintained by the monastic establishment.

Here the Lindisfarne colophon is relevant. However sceptical we might be about it as a historical record, it does indicate the kind of people who might have been expected to have been involved. Firstly, there was a bishop to write and also to decorate the volume: a most demanding task, which required immense patience and attention to detail, but which also displayed great inventiveness and imagination. Subsequently, the external covering, involving impressed leather, was made by another bishop, known for his skill in such work. Finally, a man skilled in working in metal and gems provided further adornment. Evidently these skills were all available to the Lindisfarne monastery.

In addition to ecclesiastics, of course, kings and lesser secular lords would also be patrons of fine metalwork. In Northumbria, we may note that, in addition to other precious treasures belonging to king Edwin, which Paulinus took back to Kent after the king's death, were a great gold cross and golden chalice (*HE* ii, 20). For another revealing example, we may turn to the Merovingian kingdom in the mid-7th century. Eligius, bishop of Noviomagensis, and royal moneyer, is described by his biographer as sitting with his Saxon house-slave in a sunken-floored building (*in defossum*), making jewelled vessels of gold for the use of the king (Krusch 1902, 676; Roth 1986, 62). This makes the double point that while a king may be a patron, no less a person than a bishop may be a metal-smith. This agrees well with the implications of the Lindisfarne colophon.

It might be assumed that a Gospel book, written and decorated in a monastery and dedicated to the service of God, would have had no negotiable value in the secular world. This view, however, appears to be contradicted by an inscription in the so-called Lichfield Gospels. These (perhaps a Mercian work of the earlier 8th century AD) were in Wales in the 9th century, and there they acquired the inscription: 'Gelhi son of Arihtuid bought this Gospel from Cingal and gave him for it his best horse' (cited by G Henderson 1987, 126). Admittedly, Gelhi then placed it on the altar of St Teilo, but the previous transaction raises several queries: how did the Gospel come to be available for a barter-sale, and how frequently might holy books be exchanged in this way; in general economic terms, how common altogether was barter-exchange; and in terms of values, do we infer that a Gospel book was of very little worth, or that a 'best horse' (*equum optimum*) was of great value?



Finally, we may turn briefly from the artist to the social role of his product. Any prominent public monument, any artefact of high quality, whether a personal jewel or a vessel consecrated to the Church, makes a statement about status: firstly about the status, in terms of wealth or rank, of the person who originally commissioned it; secondly, if it is

then passed on to a second party, whether individual or institutional, it establishes their status as well.

Indeed, it has been suggested in relation to the commonest form of Insular jewel, the penannular or pseudo-penannular brooch, that the pronounced gradations in the richness of such brooches, as perceived by modern eyes, corresponded to actual ranks among the jewel-wearing nobility (Nieke & Duncan 1988). This idea is linked to the significance of artefacts, from swords to brooches, as rewards for services rendered, or gifts in anticipation of services to come. Poetic sources demonstrate very clearly the expectations of the court bard, and that of the warrior as well.

Indirectly, the desire of potentates and their subordinates for the products of high craftsmanship as gifts and rewards was one of the major driving forces in the economy. Raw materials—gold, silver, bronze, semi-precious stones for inlays—had to be paid for in some system of barter or exchange. The material needs of the craftsman—shelter, food, clothing—had to be furnished at an appropriate level. All this required the extraction of an adequate surplus at the level of basic production, that of the ploughman, the herd, the fisherman. In general, it is difficult for us today to identify that basic level of society in either the written or the direct archaeological evidence: but in the work of craftsmen, we have at least a proxy indicator of the level of surplus production.

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## FINE METALWORK

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**A**t the time of the deposition of the great treasure in the Sutton Hoo ship burial—that is to say, a decade or two after AD 600—Germanic or Anglo-Saxon metalwork was quite distinct from that of the Celts. There were some slight traces of borrowing or overlap, but the creative fusion, formerly designated ‘Hiberno-Saxon’, and here presented as the flowering of Insular art, had not yet occurred.

It is therefore convenient to consider first the metalwork prior to that flowering, under the two separate heads of Anglian and Celtic; and then to turn to the later work, treating this as essentially a unity with minor regional variations. For the reasons expounded in the previous chapter, little attempt will be made to suggest any precise chronologies. Broadly speaking, however, the earlier phase may be thought of as extending into the 7th century, while the later phase continues until, in the 9th century, the Viking invasions introduced new Continental styles.

### 19.1 BEFORE THE INSULAR FLORESCENCE

#### 19.1.1 Anglian metalwork

Anglian metalwork of this period is largely known from grave deposits. In Bernicia these are rather rare and poorly furnished with jewellery (Miket 1980; Alcock 1981a). Fortunately for the present study, in 1982 a large and relatively rich cemetery was discovered, and subsequently excavated, at Norton in Cleveland (Co Durham). This has been lavishly published (Sherlock & Welch 1992). Since it lies on the north side of the Tees valley, it may reasonably be assigned to Bernicia rather than to Deira.

The fine metalwork at Norton consisted chiefly of dress-fastenings and ornaments of bronze, occasionally with traces of gilding or silvering. The principal ornaments—which no doubt also served to fasten garments or to attach rows of beads—were brooches. A popular class was the annular brooch, in the form of a hoop of bronze with simple incised or relief ornament. They often occur as a pair, one at each shoulder, perhaps to fasten a cloak. Such brooches are especially common in north-east England in the 6th century. In decorative terms, they do not rate highly; but it is a matter of historic interest that one pair from Norton has a close parallel at the Votadinian enclosed homestead at Crock Cleuch, Roxburghs, while another can be matched at the Buiston, Ayrshire, crannog (illus 96 above).

More spectacular are a group of cruciform brooches (illus 118), a very common Germanic type. In profile, they show a pronounced bow, in which the material of a dress or cloak might be gathered and then fastened by the hinged or sprung pin. This essentially simple mechanism was then embellished by head- and foot-plates, and side lappets. These provided fields for exuberant ornamentation in Germanic Style I, so that a major sub-class of these brooches are known as ‘florid cruciforms’. The principal decoration,

in cast relief, takes the form of animal heads, in which jaws—often gaping or biting—and bulging eyes were prominent. The heads may be either profile or full face. These often ferocious-looking animals were probably intended as powerful protection for their owners, rather than as mere decoration. Very occasionally, a complete animal is represented, with head, body, and both a hind- and a fore-leg; and it was from these ‘quadrupeds’ (correctly bipeds) that there sprang the ribbon-animals (with three or four legs and a tail) which formed the menagerie of 7th- and 8th-century art. Subsequently, with rare exceptions such as eagle-heads, the Style I detached heads, whether profile or full-face, faded away.

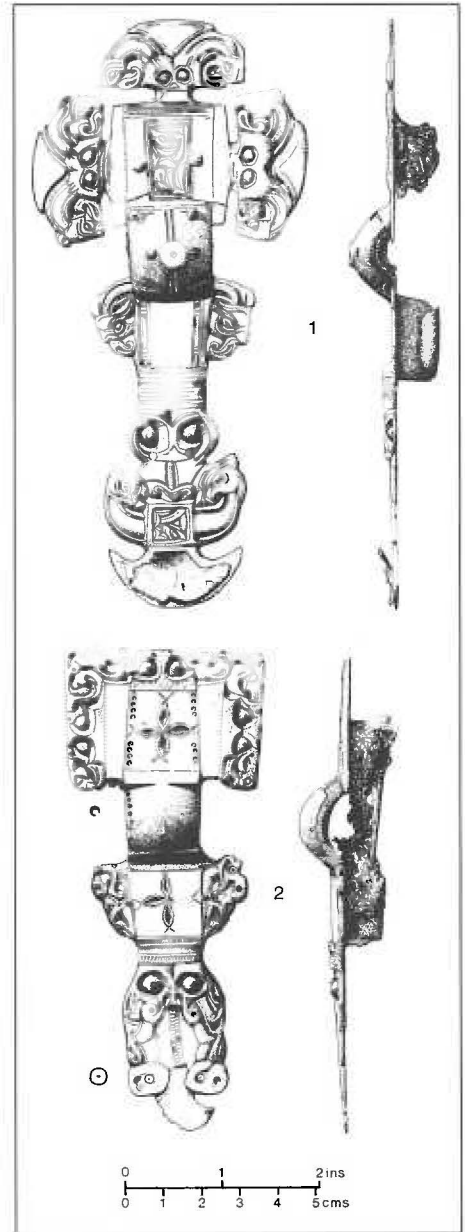
Two quite minor penannular brooches from Norton must again be mentioned here (18.1.3 above; illus 117). They are a very small penannular brooch of type G2, previously restricted to western Scotland and northern Ireland; and a larger example of type G1, of which only two have previously been known further north. They are interesting essentially because of their location in the Tees valley, where they fill a gap in the overall distribution. That the two types should be found together on the southern fringes of Bernicia hints at contacts, of an ill-defined nature, between Anglian and Celtic metalworkers in the 6th century AD.

### 19.1.2 Celtic metalwork: pins, brooches and bowls

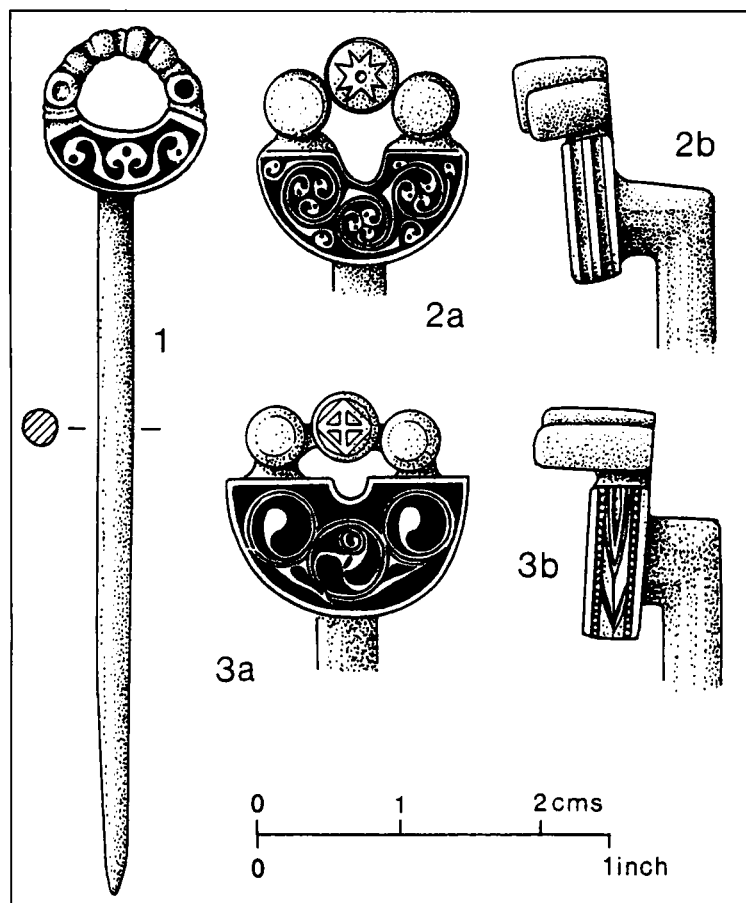
Among the Celts of western and northern Britain (and Ireland too, though that is beyond the scope of this study), the most common items of fine metalwork during the 5th and 6th centuries were pins and brooches for dress-fastening and ornament, and so-called hanging-bowls, the purpose of which is still in debate. The principal metal was bronze, though silver was also used. There is much interesting variety in the shapes of the pins and brooches, and also of the escutcheons which held the suspension rings of the bowls. Moreover, the forms might be further embellished with incised or relief ornament, or with inlays of enamel (actually a vitreous paste) or glass. All three classes can be traced back to the Roman period, but they principally flourished in the 5th and 6th centuries in that Celtic revival which has already been mentioned (above 18.1.1).

#### Pins

To start with the simplest class: the most attractive group of pins are characterised by a head, offset from the stem, which takes the form of a half-moon or crescent, surmounted by a beaded semi-hoop or group of three or more protruding rods which suggest fingers (illus 119). These are therefore known as handpins, while the beaded hoops are proto-handpins (illustrations, but unacceptable chronology, in Kilbride-Jones 1980a, figs 67-74).



118  
Copper-alloy  
cruciform brooches  
from Norton  
(Cleveland):  
1) from grave 30/4  
has traces of  
gilding; 2) from  
grave 22/5 (after  
*Sherlock & Welch*  
1992).



119  
Silver hand-pins  
with enamelled  
inlay from  
Oldcroft, Glos (1),  
Gaulcross, Banffs  
(2) and Norries  
Law, Fife (3).

another Celtic motif, with a long prehistoric ancestry: the love of three-fold repetition. The pin was found, as a secondary deposit in a prehistoric cairn, together with other silver objects which have all been lost except for a magnificent chain and bracelet.

Before we turn from the pins, some emphasis must be placed on the size of the decorated heads. The pelta-and-tendrill design at Oldcroft spans no more than 9mm, while the considerably more elaborate pattern at Gaulcross is laid out within a semicircular frame of 17mm diameter. We must pay tribute here to the keen eyesight and the manual dexterity of the craftsmen, attributes which we will find repeated in later metalwork and manuscript decoration.

### Brooches

Our second category, brooches, provided more varied scope for ornament, and was of particular importance for future developments. The most common class was the penannular brooch. This consisted of an interrupted hoop and a movable pin. The pin was thrust through folds of cloth, and then passed through the gap in the hoop; the hoop itself was then swivelled behind the pin, so locking the brooch—which might be quite large and heavy—firmly in the garment.

The basic study of brooches before the Insular flowering was written three decades ago

An important early example from Oldcroft, Gloucestershire, is firmly dated because it was found in a coin-hoard deposited in AD 354-9 (Johns 1974). The upper curve of the head has four beaded swellings, and then a small disc of red enamel on either side. The lower crescent consists of a field of red enamel, with a flowing design reserved in silver, in the form of a central pelta flanked by two tendrils with eye-like dots suggesting birds' heads. We are here introduced at once to the technique of *champlevé* enamel, and to the essential Celtic aesthetic features of curvilinearity, zoomorphism and ambiguity.

These features are well seen on a 6th-century handpin from the Gaulcross, Banffs, hoard (Stevenson & Emery 1964; Youngs 1989, 26 with colour plate p 33). Here the central 'finger' has a star, while the lower crescent or 'palm' has a basic design of three interlinked circles, each enclosing three birds' heads. In the field are a further five birds' heads loosely linked to the three circles. This introduces yet

(Fowler 1963; see also Kilbride-Jones 1980b). It has undergone some modifications of the basic typology, and has left some unresolved debates on chronology, but it is still fundamental. From a decorative point of view, the most interesting series comprises the zoomorphic penannulars. In general terms, these first appear in Late Roman Britain, and perhaps simultaneously in Ireland; the richest decorative development appears to have been in Ireland; but we shall see that the discovery of moulds on excavated sites (and two examples recorded on Glenluce Sands in Wigtownshire: illus 120) increasingly indicates manufacture in northern Britain as well.

The term 'zoomorphic' denotes that the terminals either side of the gap in the hoop bear some resemblance to an animal head. This is clearest in the case of class F3 (Fowler 1964), on which the head, sharply demarcated from the rest of the hoop, faces towards the gap. It has large staring eyes, and a marked snout. Although the main known distribution is in Ireland, especially the north, a recent discovery of a mould in the Argyll fort of Dunadd demonstrates that some F3 brooches had been cast in Dál Riata (Newman 1989; 1990).

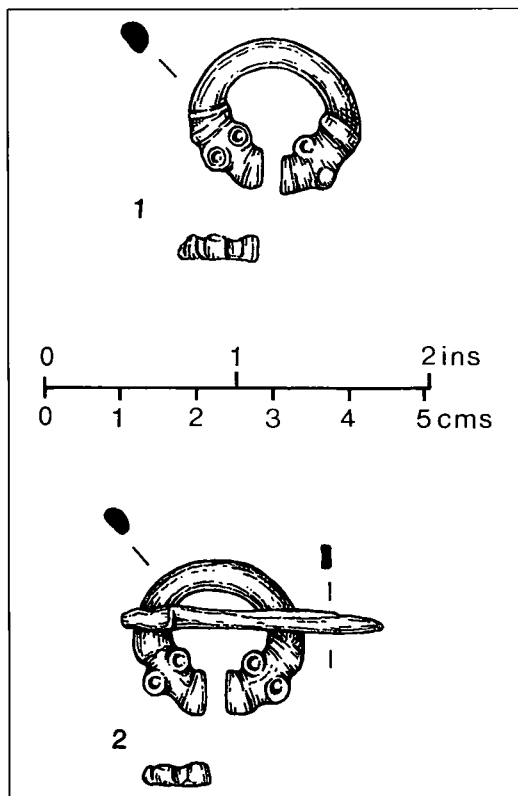
In the case of the much more frequent F1 and F2 zoomorphic penannulars, the animal-head is less obvious, partly because it is turned away from the gap, which is flanked on either side by a suggestion of pointed ears. The head itself is a flat field, which may be plain (class F1) or richly decorated (F2). Following round the hoop, there are then two more-or-less bulging eyes, and then the snout proper, which is especially prominent when seen in profile.

The flat, roughly triangular, field of the majority of heads may measure as much as 28mm x 16mm, and on the F2s it thus offers considerably more scope for decoration than is the case of the enamelled handpins. This decoration frequently consists of scrolls and peltae reserved in yellow bronze against sealing-wax-red enamel. Also very popular was the floating, in a background of red enamel, of slices of millefiori ('thousand flowers') glass: that is, rods of coloured glass fused together in chequer and star patterns. Finally, the swivel-pin itself—and especially the loop by which it is attached to the hoop—may also be decorated.

It has already been suggested that these penannular brooches originated in the later 4th century AD. A clue to the date of the highly ornamented F2 brooches is given by the occurrence of similar—though more advanced—champlevé and millefiori decoration on the large hanging-bowl at Sutton Hoo. Since this had already required a repair before it was buried in the early 7th century, a date in the later 6th century would seem appropriate for the brooches.

As to where the F1 and F2 brooches were made: the sheer quantity discovered in Ireland is held by some commentators to indicate the place of manufacture. This may be a function of the occasions of discovery, for many of the Irish brooches were found by chance by peat-diggers. On the other hand, millefiori rods have been discovered on various excavations in Britain. Moreover, a lead model for making moulds for casting an F2

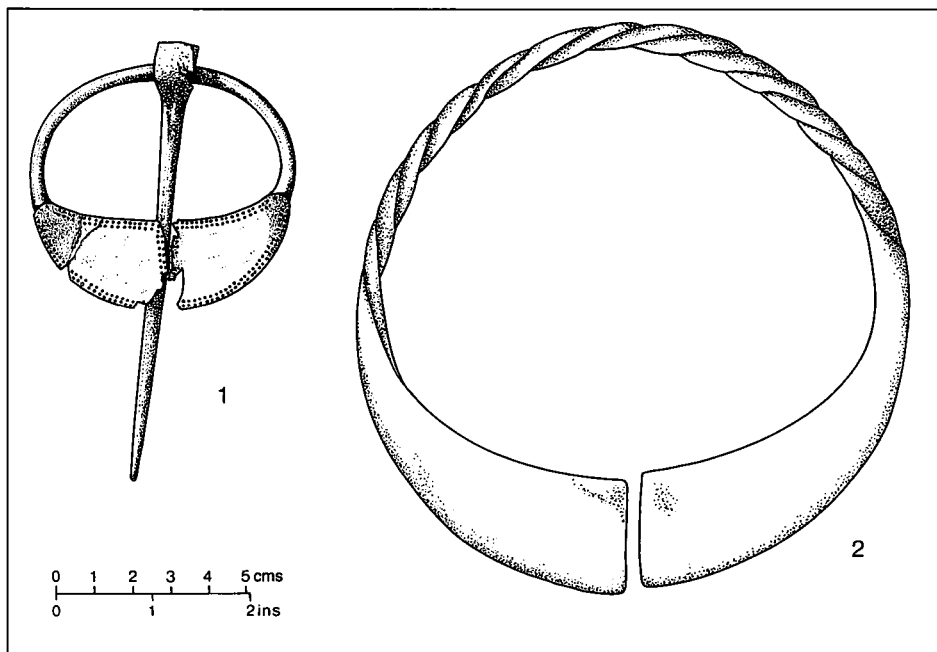
120  
Class F3 penannular brooches from Glenluce Sands, Wigtownshire.



brooch was found in a small fort at Dinas Powys in south Wales (Alcock 1963; Graham-Campbell 1991b).

A further class of penannular brooch, class H (Fowler 1964), has flat, curved-triangular terminals with a simple ornamentation of punched dots. The distribution is scattered over Ireland and Britain, and three were found along with fragments of a hanging-bowl (illus 121, 1) at Tummel Bridge, sometime before 1888, under the roots of a blown down tree (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 22 (1888), 268-9; Leeds 1933, fig 37). The particular interest of these is that they were of silver, a metal that was much favoured in Scotland, as we have already seen in the case of the Gaulcross hoard (above). (Some of the richest hoards come from the Northern Isles, and are therefore outside the scope of this work, the most striking being that from St Ninian's Isle, Shetland (Small *et al* 1973)). It seems possible that the silver came from the recycling of Late Roman silver (like that from the Traprain Treasure: Curle 1923) which had come into the hands of the barbarian tribes of eastern Scotland as diplomatic gifts or bribes.

121  
1) Silver penannular brooch (Class H) from Tummel Bridge, Perthshire and 2) silver torc from Norries Law, Fife.



Another, exceptionally large silver hoard was discovered in a tumulus on the hill of Norrie's Law, Fife, about 1819; regrettably, much of it was dispersed or even melted down (Graham-Campbell 1991a for recent summary and discussion). Of present relevance, it included two supposed class H penannulars (Fowler 1964, 142). This classification is rejected here, in favour of the view that they are actually torcs, that is, neck rings, a form of ornament that is more common in British poetry than in the archaeology (illus 121, 2). The reason for this reclassification is that, unlike the Tummel Bridge examples, which have a diameter around 73mm (3 ins), the internal diameters of the Norrie's Law ones measure respectively 147mm x 112mm (6 x 4½ ins) and 126mm x 110mm (5 x 4½ ins) (Laing 1993, 99-100). This is considerably larger than that of the largest known penannular brooches, but is close to the lower range of undoubted torcs of Iron-age date in northern Britain (138-170mm: M MacGregor 1976, illus 195-208). The Norrie's Law objects are certainly suitable for wear around the neck, being compa-

rable to a modern collar size of 15-16. Moreover, the twisted hoops at Norrie's Law appear to be unknown on brooches, perhaps because the twist would impede the smooth movement of a pin. On the other hand, it would make the hoop springy rather than rigid.

### Hanging-bowls

From this necessarily brief and selective survey of pins and brooches we have gained some idea of the personal adornments common in the Celtic areas of northern Britain in the 5th and 6th centuries, and probably on into the 7th century. We now turn to a quite different kind of metal object, one of communal rather than personal use: bronze hanging-bowls (corpus, Brennan 1991; discussions, Fowler 1968; Bruce-Mitford 1987).

These are shallow circular bowls, with diameters in the range 150-300mm (6-12in), which have apparently been spun from a single sheet of bronze. The rim is normally strengthened by being folded over, and beneath it is a shallow neck which accommodates three suspension rings. These are held by hooks, of which the upper end, in the form of a bird- or animal-head, rests on the rim. The lower end of the hook expands into an escutcheon or attachment which is fixed to the shoulder of the bowl. This attachment is normally circular. The base of the bowl is recessed internally, and there may be escutcheons both inside and outside the base.

Much highly skilled craftsmanship has gone into the making of these bowls, and they were evidently items of high prestige. Significant in this respect is the fact that the most elaborately ornamented bowl, which has purely decorative square escutcheons as well as the functional circular ones, was found in the richest known burial, that at Sutton Hoo (col illus I.7). It is reasonable to believe that it had been specially commissioned for the East Anglian royal dynasty. This of course was an Anglo-Saxon context, and indeed most of the best-preserved bowls come from pagan Anglo-Saxon burials. But the normal ornament on the bowls is characteristically Celtic, and they are therefore regarded as being the work of British craftsmen. This leaves open the question; how did they get into pagan hands? Was it as loot, or by purchase or even commission?

Another question, even more difficult to resolve, is the function of the bowls. There is broad agreement (but not without reservations) that they were intended to hold liquid. This might have been oil, with a floating wick to make a lamp. But a clear liquid seems more likely so that the design on the internal base escutcheon might be seen. So water is suggested, perhaps for hand-washing at a noble feast; or perhaps sanctified water for Christian rituals. The debate continues.

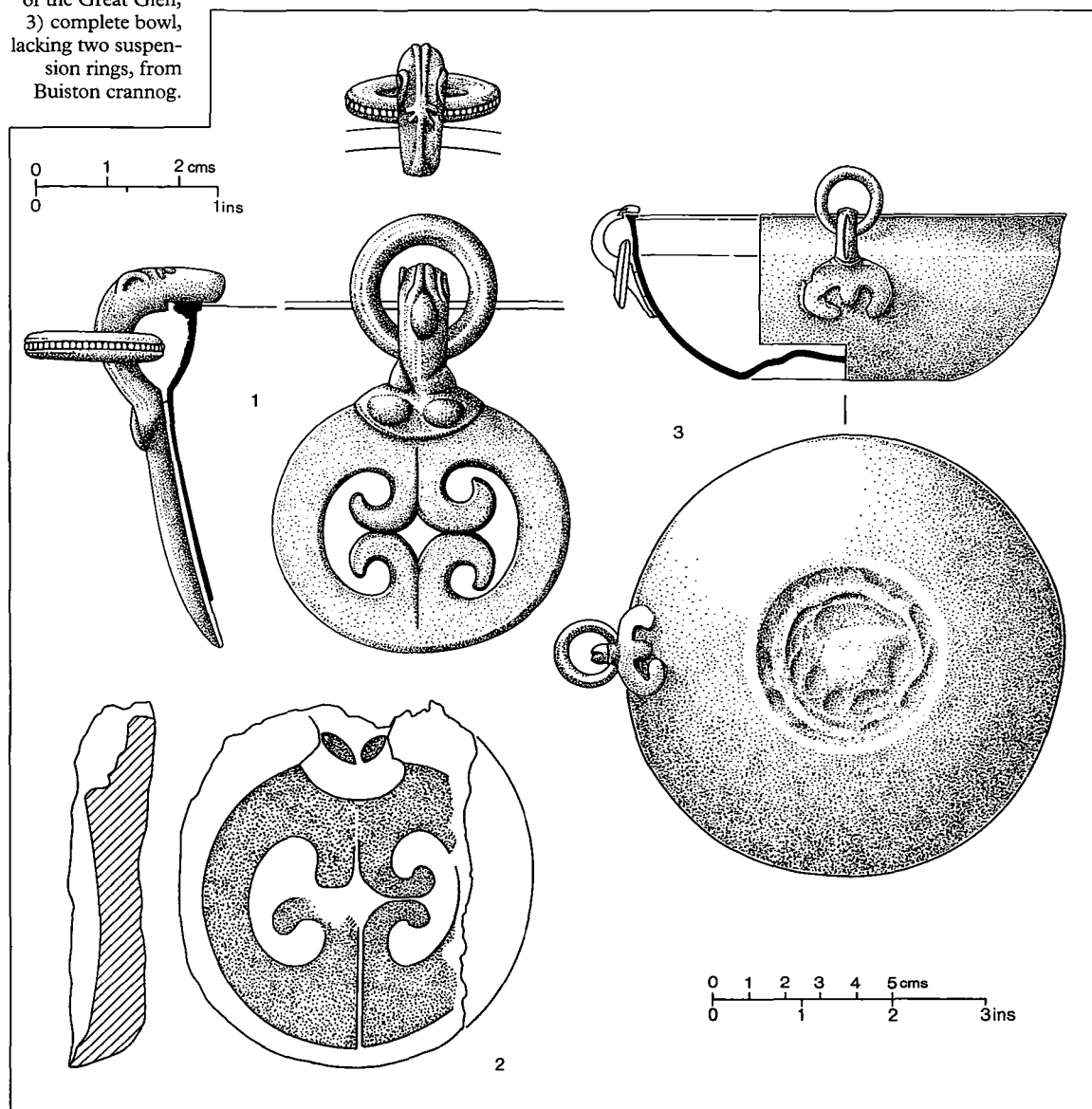
To date some 26 complete or nearly complete bowls have been recorded but, when fragmentary examples are included, the tally in Britain as a whole is about 80 (maps in Bruce-Mitford 1987, fig 1; Brennan 1991, fig 0.2). The most important aspect of the bowls is that they demonstrate the development and repertory of British-Celtic ornamentation from beginnings in the last Roman century, through to the eve of that fusion of Celtic and Germanic styles which created the florescence of Insular art. Because the escutcheons provided a larger field for decoration than was available on the heads of handpins or the terminals of penannular brooches, we see the full range of techniques and motifs: open work and relief; enamelling with interlinked peltas and spirals, running spirals, curving open-mouthed 'trumpets', occasional bird- or animal-heads on spirals; in millefiori, stars, crosses-in-circles and chequer patterns. This was the repertory available in the early decades of the 7th century, as the great bowl from Sutton Hoo demonstrates (Bruce-Mitford 1983, 206-44; Evans 1986, 72-5).

122

Hanging-bowls  
from Scotland:

- 1) suspension ring  
and escutcheon  
from rim of  
hanging-bowl at  
Loch Moidart,  
Inverness;  
2) fragment of  
mould from a  
similar escutcheon  
from Craig Phadraig  
at the opposite end  
of the Great Glen;  
3) complete bowl,  
lacking two suspen-  
sion rings, from  
Buiston crannog.

Little of this was, in fact, present in Britain north of the Tees. North of the Forth-Clyde isthmus, there are fragments of bowls and escutcheons from the Tummel Bridge hoard (along with silver penannular brooches: Leeds 1933, fig 37); and also from a supposed fort on a tidal island at Tioram in Loch Moidart on the west coast of Inverness-shire (Kilbride-Jones 1937; here illus 122). Both of these have escutcheons with openwork peltas, and a mould for casting such escutcheons has been recovered from a fort at Craig Phadraig above the lower Ness valley (Stevenson 1976a, illus 2e). Limited excavations there yielded a few sherds of pottery of Gaulish origin (so-called E-ware), datable to the late 6th and 7th centuries—flimsy evidence for dating such escutcheons. The most important conclusion from the mould is that one sub-class of hanging-bowls was made in a Pictish fort.



Finally, for the list of bowls recovered in Scotland, mention must be made of a quite recent discovery from the Buiston crannog (illus 122). This is the smallest known, with a bowl diameter of only 123mm (4.75in). It is in good condition, except that only one of the expected three escutcheon-attachments is still present. Compared with the Tioram and Clatchard Craig escutcheons, the Buiston example is rather simple (RBK Stevenson 2000).

From Bernicia comes a bowl with decoration of quite exceptional interest (illus 123). This was found before 1813 in a tumulus which also yielded ‘cart-loads of human bones and skulls’, near Capheaton (20km NW of Hexham, Northumberland; Cowen 1931). The suspension hooks take the form of animal heads resting on the rim of the bowl; they appear to represent otters. The base of the bowl, internally and externally, has engraved marigold designs: that is, compass-drawn six-petalled flowers. The circular escutcheons

123  
The Capheaton hanging-bowl:  
a) complete bowl;  
b) suspension ring and attachment  
(note double eagle-heads;  
c) one of three rim animals,  
otters ?; (d) the marigold design  
(Univeristy  
Newcastle upon  
Tyne).



a



b



c



d

take the form of narrow bands surrounding central voids which suggest that circular discs, possibly enamelled, have been lost. The bands have an incised key-pattern consisting of alternating L-shaped lines (cf *ECMS*, 333, pattern no 893). The escutcheons are symbolically supported by eagles' beaks, placed back-to-back with a central disc of red enamel representing the common head for the two beaks.

This is an eclectic assemblage of powerful symbols, unusual as a group among the repertory of hanging-bowl escutcheons. The key-pattern and the marigold both have Roman antecedents, and reflect the romanising influences which are present in an early phase of the British development of hanging-bowls. But the marigold in a circle acquired a strong Christian significance, because the six-leaved figure could be seen as a sacred monogram of the Greek letters *Iota* and *Chi*, initial letters of *Iesous Christos* (*Encyclopaedia*, 279). As such, the marigold appears, for instance on Early Christian sarcophagi in Merovingian Gaul (E Salin 1952, 159-63); indeed James (1977) describes the motif as 'ubiquitous' on such sarcophagi. Its occurrence on the external basal escutcheon of a hanging-bowl from Baginton, Warwicks, may also suggest Christian implications (Leeds 1935).

The eagle, of course, also acquired a Christian significance as the symbol of St John the Evangelist, but in the form in which we see it at Capheaton its antecedents are plainly Germanic, among cloisonné-and-garnet jewellery featuring eagles with large round heads and strongly curved beaks. A typical example from Thuringia is dated to the later 5th century (Roth 1986, Taf 37, 38), and from Holland comes a large circular head sharing no less than four beaks (Speake 1980, fig 3c). Conjoined pairs of heads appear in southern England (Speake 1980, fig 6), including those on a gilded silver patch on the large hanging-bowl from Sutton Hoo (Bruce-Mitford 1983, 231-3; Evans 1986, fig 60). The outstanding example around 600 AD is the facing pair of eagles' heads which protected the hidden relic-cavity in the great gold buckle in the same burial (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 536-64; Evans 1986, 89-91: here illus 114 above). While the romanising decoration may suggest an early date for the Capheaton bowl, the eagles' heads indicate a wide bracket centred on AD 600.

## 19.2 THE INSULAR FLORESCENCE IN METALWORK

### 19.2.1 Elements of design: the importance of interlace

The dominant art motif of the Insular florescence, whether on metal, stone or vellum, was undoubtedly interlace. This is a deceptively simple statement: the origins of interlace in Insular contexts, and its chronology or chronologies, have been—and remain—subjects of fierce but inconclusive debates. Even a simple but workable definition eludes us; which may account for the fact that 'interlace' is not to be found in the glossaries of recent de-luxe illustrated catalogues aimed at an informed lay readership.

A basic definition might cite a pattern in which several strands pass over and under each other alternately (Osborne 1990, 583-4). This would indeed be appropriate for the interlace of Classical Antiquity, and also for one class of Early Medieval interlace, such as may be seen on three panels on the south face of the Bewcastle cross (illus 160 below). These patterns, which may perhaps be distinguished as 'pure' or 'abstract' interlace, have been the subject of a very refined classificatory system by Allen (*ECMS*, 140-201, mentioned above 18.1.3), which was reviewed and simplified by Adcock (1978: see also

Cramp 1984a, xxviii-xlv). In distinction from this 'abstract' interlace are the many forms of 'zoomorphic' interlace, in which the lacing strands include or terminate in an animal- or bird-head, frequently with body and limbs as well. Kitzinger, in pointing to this difference between what he calls 'true interlace' and 'zoomorphic' (1993, 3), nonetheless adds that 'the distinction would be totally artificial'. We may find, in this and the following chapter, that this judgement is more true in the case of painting than in that of metalwork.

The range of permutations in zoomorphic interlace may be greater than that in 'true' interlace. Parts of animals, especially heads, may mark breaks or terminations in what at first sight appears to be non-zoomorphic. Legs, tails, and lappets of a single animal may be entwined; the bodies and other extensions of two adjacent animals may be intertwined. In some cases the animal form dominates, in others the strand or lace. At one extreme, such as the hoop of the great gold buckle at Sutton Hoo, the ornament might be mistaken for a strand of unravelling knitting, were it not for the serpent's head at one end (illus 114). At the other extreme, the more-or-less complete bodies of two or more animals may constitute a highly disciplined pattern, as we may see in the borders of the carpet patterns on the Sutton Hoo shoulder clasps, or in folio 192v of the Book of Durrow (below 20.3.1; col illus II.5).

Alongside the interlace patterns, especially in stone carving, there are curvilinear vegetable patterns. These may be simply stems with leaves and perhaps flowers. Frequently, however, the stems bear clusters of grapes; and, less frequently, there may be animals or birds feeding on the grapes. This 'vine-scroll' has pre-Christian, Mediterranean origins, but it was seen as an important symbol of Christ, who had said 'I am the true vine' (John, 15:1). The beasts and birds in the inhabited vine-scroll were seen as the faithful departed feeding on the body of Christ (see further below). In another version of animal-plus-plant, the intertwining lappets and other extensions of the animal body appear as vegetable tendrils thus creating the image of the animal in a thicket.

This may remind us that sometimes an animal head (or more rarely, other features) is so difficult to discern in an interlace pattern as to suggest that it has been deliberately hidden, at least from the casual glance or uninitiated eye. If it is accepted that the animals may have had some protective function (on which, see Kitzinger 1993, 4; Bailey 1992, 33-4), then to hide them may increase their mysterious power. A similar suggestion will be made about hidden, or at least deliberately obscured, words of power in the decorated Gospel books.



This brief survey has introduced some of the rich inventiveness of zoomorphic interlace. We must probably accept that its fluidity and variety, compared with the necessary repetitiveness of the 'pure' interlace, makes it unamenable to rigid classification. It certainly makes it visually far more interesting, indeed even exciting.

In the Germanic/Anglo-Saxon metalwork deposited in the Sutton Hoo ship burial, we may see a wide range of animals entwining, intertwining and interlacing, often enhanced by the use of garnets against a gold background. On the other hand, 'pure' interlace is extremely rare, apparently confined to two pieces. The first of these is the body of the dragon on the face of the shield, which has two panels with skein-like interlace (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 63-5, col pl 3; Evans 1986, fig 34). The second is a pair of rectangular

mounts, with a very formal pattern of panels outlined in cable-interlace, executed in cloisonné-and-garnet work (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 460-5; Evans 1986, fig 26).

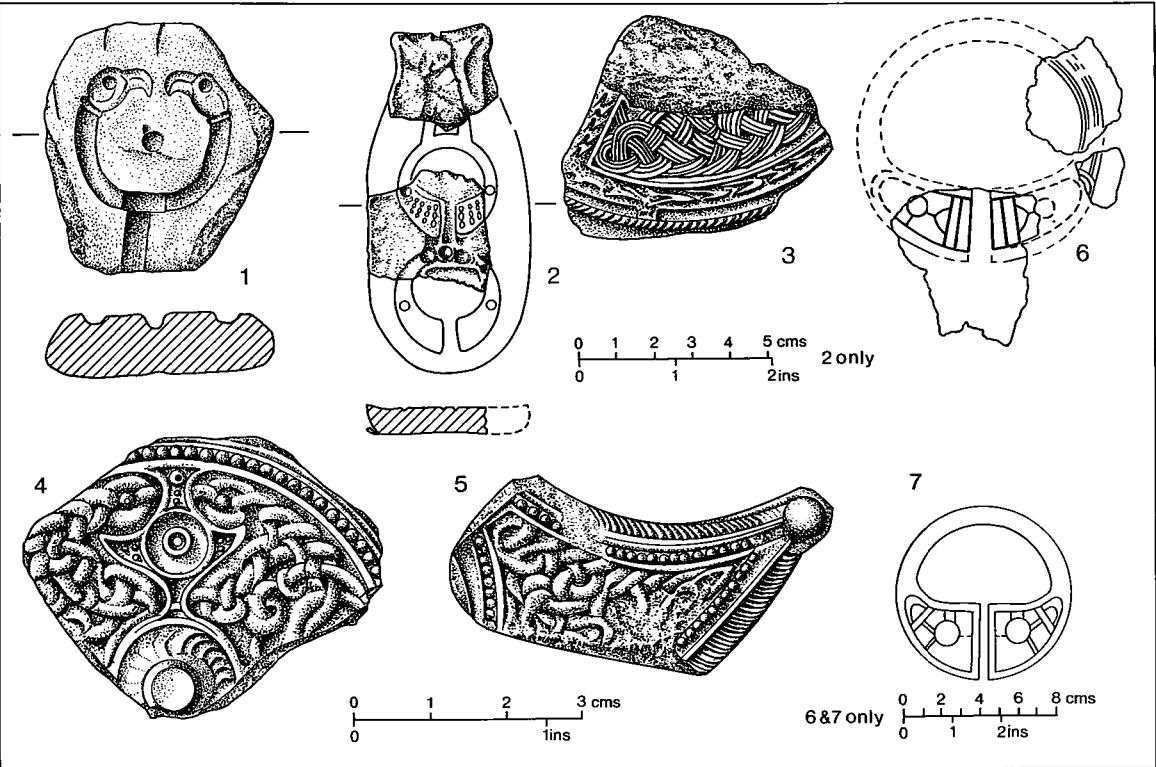
The other Insular (as opposed to Mediterranean or Oriental) component at Sutton Hoo is of Celtic/British origin: namely, the three hanging-bowls. Taking these along with the Anglo-Saxon items, the hoard thus contains the necessary elements for the Insular fusion and florescence of the later 7th century. But at Sutton Hoo itself, the Germanic and Celtic elements remain almost totally separate. There are only two clear cases of cross-borrowing. The more important is in the cloisonné work of the gold shoulder clasps, where plates of garnet alternate with blue millefiori (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 523-35 & colour pls 15-18. Evans 1986, pl VI); and on the purse lid, where millefiori is used, for instance, to replace garnet in order to emphasize hip-joints (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 487-522 & col pls 13-14; Evans 1986, pl VIII). Borrowings in the opposite direction consist of a Germanic-style repair-patch on the large hanging-bowl (Bruce-Mitford 1983, 231-3; Evans 1986, figs 57 & 60); and the escutcheons and basal ring of the medium-size bowl, which may indeed be replacements or repairs (Bruce-Mitford 1983, 246-56; Evans 1986, fig 61).

It is interesting to compare briefly the relationship between designs of Celtic origin and those in a Germanic style displayed in the Book of Durrow. Essentially, there is still separation, in the sense that the main ornament on folio 3v (col illus II.2) consists of Celtic spirals in circles linked with trumpets, whereas that on folio 192v (col illus II.4) consists of Germanic interlaced animals. But in distinction from Sutton Hoo, the two styles appear on the same object. Even more importantly, 'pure' interlace is a major feature of the carpet-pages throughout the book. But a fuller account of Durrow and other decorated manuscripts must be deferred to Chapter 20.

### 19.2.2 Artefacts of the later 7th and 8th centuries: brooches, brooch-moulds and militaria

Turning now to the fine metalwork attributed to the later 7th and 8th centuries AD which has been discovered in northern Britain, we find that the commonest item is the brooch, just as in the preceding period. These vary greatly in size; they include both penannular and pseudo-penannular forms; and they commonly, but not invariably, have zoomorphic ornament. Because the largest number of comparable brooches have been found in Ireland, the finds from western Scotland are frequently described as of 'Irish origin, derivation or type'. On the other hand, brooches discovered in eastern Scotland may be classed as Pictish, especially if they are made of silver (for examples of both the objects and the attributions, see Youngs 1989).

The largest penannulars and pseudo-penannulars are characterized especially by terminals in the form of large curving triangles, which may be decorated with integrally-cast interlace, or may have recessed-cast panels in which plates with filigree or cast decoration may be fixed. Moulds for such plates have been known from Mote of Mark in Galloway since 1913 (Curle 1914, 140-52, with figs 11-16; here illus 124); but a judicious reassessment of their significance still awaits the publication of more recent excavations (Laing & Longley forthcoming; but see Close-Brooks, Graham-Campbell, and Laing 1976). In 1993, however, an interim account of moulds and other metal-working debris from the Dál Riata fort of Dunadd, Argyll, made it clear that not all such brooches had been made in Ireland: there were equally competent jewellers among those whom Bede called 'the Irish who lived in Britain' (*Scotti qui erant in Britannia* (sic)



(Campbell & Lane 1993). If the Mote of Mark evidence is reconsidered in the light of that from Dunadd, then we may believe that large penannular brooches were also made by craftsmen of Anglian origin, probably with some British elements as well.

Case study: the Hunterston brooch

The lesson from this is that we do not need to attribute the finest brooch of penannular form found in Britain—the Hunterston brooch (illus 125; col illus I.9)—to a source across the Irish Sea. A brief description of that brooch makes an excellent introduction to the contemporary metalwork. The details of its discovery in 1830, near the west coast of Ayrshire, are unfortunately—but typically—so vague that they provide no explanation for its original deposition.

The brooch itself is a large, almost circular brooch with a maximum diameter (excluding certain animal-head protrusions) of 177mm. In form it closely resembles a traditional penannular; but in fact, there is no gap between the ‘terminals’; hence its classification as ‘pseudo-penannular’. (Such bridging of the terminals obviously negates the whole advantage of a pin which can be passed between the terminals and then moved along the hoop in order to lock the brooch in a garment). The Hunterston pin has been broken, but an original length of c 150mm has been estimated.

The brooch and pin are of gilded silver. The expanded ‘terminals’, and the keystone-shaped head of the pin, provide expansive fields for further embellishment with round and rectangular insets of amber, and more particularly with inset plates with zoomorphic

124  
Moulds for penannular brooches from Dunadd (1, 7), Clatchard Craig (2, 6) and Mote of Mark (3, 4, 5).



125  
Hunterston,  
Ayrshire, pseudo-  
penannular brooch  
(National Museums  
of Scotland).

(and rarely pure) interlace executed in filigree. In contrast with the overall filigree decoration of the front, the rear of the brooch has four spaced panels of cast ornament in faceted (so-called chip-carved) technique. These seem intended to reveal the craftsman's wide knowledge of contemporary styles, for the smallest panel has pure interlace, that on the hoop has two Germanic ribbon-animals, and the two triangular panels share variations of Celtic scrolls, trumpets, peltas and birds' heads.

Returning to the front of the brooch: the outer curve of the hoop is broken at four points: at the root of each terminal is a cast bird's head, looking towards the maximum expansion of the 'terminals', where there are two confronted swellings, matched by two similar swellings on the inner curve of the hoop. On closer inspection, it is seen that these four swellings are eagles' beaks, their heads formed by large round bosses of amber.

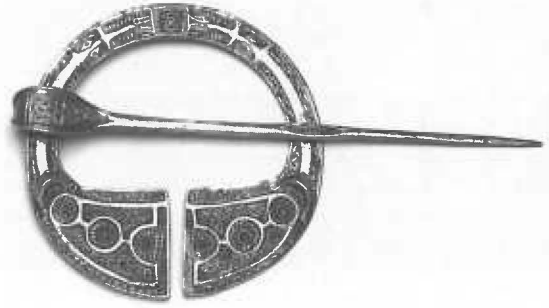
The four eagles face inwards to a rectangular frame enclosing a cruciform pattern of four amber settings. The frame is reinforced with narrow panels with interlaced serpents in filigree, which link the inner and outer pairs of heads. Altogether this makes a very tight composition. Visually it is the centre-piece of the brooch; and iconographically it is the *raison d'être* of the whole design, placing an ultimately Germanic-derived pagan symbolism at the service of Christianity. These comments have wide implications as to the purpose of zoomorphic interlace—was it iconographic, or merely decorative?—and also as to the identification of the person for whom the brooch was commissioned—perhaps a high-ranking cleric (Stevenson 1974; 1983; Youngs 1989, 91-2, with col illus p75).

### Brooches from Perthshire, Mull and Stirlingshire

Two brooches from eastern Scotland are of particular interest because they are recorded as having been found near Clunie Castle, Perthshire, in a valley through-route between Blairgowrie and Dunkeld. Clunie was an important royal castle in the 12th century, but the masonry castle overlies an earthwork which would be appropriate as a power centre

for an Early Historic king or noble; and the brooches, to be described shortly would be equally appropriate to the wealth of a person of such status. To go beyond this is mere surmise; but it may be conjectured that the brooches had been buried for safety when the Danes are said to have ravaged Pictland as far as Clunie and Dunkeld (Alcock 1981b, 161 with fig 39.4: the negative assessment by RCAHMS 1994a, 90 is rejected here).

The brooches are silver penannulars. The larger (illus 126), with a hoop 116mm in diameter, is entirely cast, with the decoration of the terminals mimicking zoomorphic filigree interlace within an overall pattern which we shall see (below) in moulds from Clatchard Craig, Fife, and Dunadd, Argyll. The main theme of that pattern is a semi-circle and two circles each enclosing a small setting for a stud. At the head of the hoop is another circular setting for a stud, which had been guarded by two rather curious serpents which lie along the curve of the hoop.



126  
Clunie Castle,  
Perthshire: large  
silver penannular  
brooch (*National  
Museums of  
Scotland*).



The smaller brooch (illus 127), 82mm in diameter, was altogether more elaborate. The terminals are essentially circular, but have three protrusions which accommodate inward-facing animal heads. Some of the decoration is missing from the hoop, the pin-head, and the cusp which links the hoop and the left-hand terminals, but enough remains to show that it consisted of filigree patterns in both pure and zoomorphic interlace. The filigree itself was of beaded gold wire set on trays of gold sheet (Youngs 1989, 114-5).

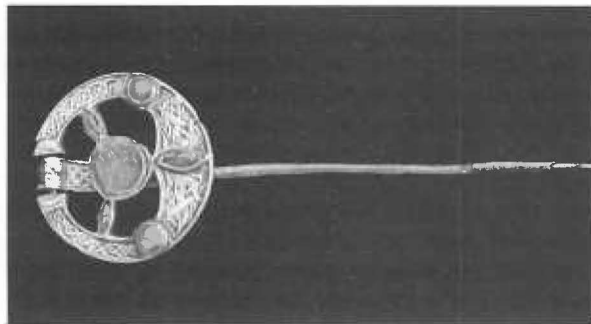
127  
Clunie Castle,  
Perthshire: small  
silver penannular  
brooch (*National  
Museums of  
Scotland*).

Profuse animal interlace, again not filigree but cast, is seen on a gilt-bronze brooch from Mull (illus 128). This had originally been cast as a pseudo-penannular, but the bridge between the terminals had been cut away to allow for fastening in the manner of a true penannular. The most remarkable feature of the brooch, however, was that it had been embellished with no less than 21 amber or stone insets, circular, half-moon, and square. All these are regrettably now missing (Youngs 1989, 96-7).



Rather more lowly than the large- to medium-sized penannulars and pseudo-penannulars were brooches with a circular head, some 25-40mm in diameter, and a disproportionately long pin, up to 130mm long. The ornamentation of the head sometimes suggests a scaled-down penannular. A silver example from Dunipace, Stirlingshire (illus 129), has a large central amber setting, which is linked to the hoop by two lentoid settings. A similar lentoid setting occupies the position of the gap in a true penannular,

128  
Isle of Mull: cast  
gilt-bronze penan-  
nular brooch  
(*National Museums  
of Scotland*).



129

Dunipace,  
Stirlingshire:  
pseudo-penannular  
silver brooch with  
amber settings  
(*National Museums  
of Scotland*).

and there are two round amber bosses at the junction of the hoop and the 'terminals'. The hoop is decorated with (apparently) pure interlace, and the 'terminals' with vigorous animals (Youngs 1989, 104-5). Though the brooch has been classed above as lowly, this is merely by comparison with the most sumptuous examples described above. In fact, made as it is of silver, and embellished with six amber settings and vigorous cast relief, it would seem a suitable gift to a noble person.



Most of the examples of fine metalwork described above and illustrated in de-luxe catalogues such as *The Making of England* (Webster & Backhouse 1991) and *The Work of Angels* (Youngs 1989) have been discovered by chance; especially, in Ireland, as a result of digging peats for fuel, which accounts in part for the greater number of Irish finds. For the recovery of smaller, but not necessarily insignificant, objects, we must turn to the more favourable conditions of regular archaeological excavations. A few examples may be cited.

### Brooches from excavations

130

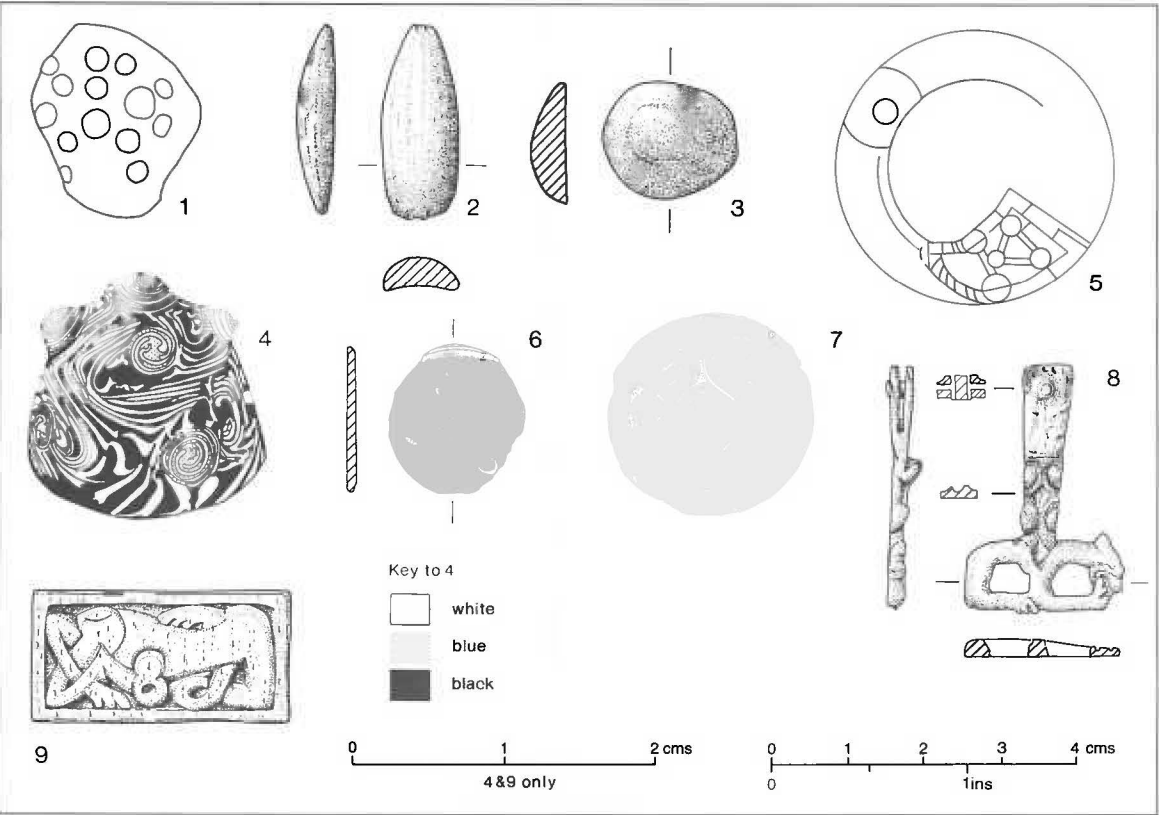
Loch Glashan  
crannog, Argyll:  
bronze penannular  
brooch with amber  
bosses (some  
missing) (*National  
Museums of  
Scotland*).

In Dál Riata, excavation of a crannog at Loch Glashan (illus 130), has yielded a bronze penannular only 34mm diameter. The terminals are four-lobed, with simple relief ornament and central amber bosses, and there is a similar boss at the centre of the hoop (RCAHMS 1988, 205-8; Alcock 1993, fig 15). At Dunadd, a bronze disc, 29mm in diameter, decorated with ribbon interlace against an enamelled background, was found in excavations in 1929 (Craw 1930, fig 4; here illus 131); and in more recent excavations another champlévé enamelled disc, this time with Celtic spirals, was recovered, as well as a superb gold-mounted garnet stud, only 6mm in diameter, and a bronze fragment with stamped animal ornament (Campbell & Lane 1993, fig 6.6).



In Pictland, a bronze disc, no more than 22mm in diameter, but ornamented with six interlocked peltae, was found at Clatchard Craig, Fife. Its purpose is unknown, but it is a witness to skilled and delicate craftsmanship (Close-Brooks 1986, illus 28.122; here illus 131, 6). The Pictish fort of Dundurn, Perthshire, yielded a silvered bronze dangle, 32mm long, with an animal biting its forepaw (Alcock *et al* 1989, illus 14.1A; here illus 131, 8).

Finally, in Bernicia, unpublished excavations at the royal stronghold of Bamburgh have yielded a gold plaque, no more than 17mm long, perhaps originally inset on a reliquary or book-cover (illus 131, 9). The importance of this small piece is that it bears an engraved beast biting its own forepaw: a motif which can be traced back through the



mid-7th century *Book of Durrow* to the great gold buckle at Sutton Hoo at the beginning of that century. Large speculations in the field of art history have been derived from this tiny beast (Bailey 1992, fig 4).



These small objects may be regarded as trivia (except by their finders); but especially in the case of the enamelled discs and the stamped animal ornament they originally belonged to larger objects such as hanging-bowls, for which we have no other evidence from these particular sites. Moreover, their very smallness helps to reinforce our appreciation of the delicate skills of the jeweller. And a small but apparently complete object like the Dundurn dangle may suggest, as do the smaller penannular brooches, that some fine metalwork may have been distributed down at least to the middle ranks of society. This may well have been the social context of the small G2 penannular brooch, of bronze with silvered or tinned terminals, recovered along with fragments of a glass bowl and beaker, from the small fort of Castlehill Dalry, Ayrshire (Smith 1919; illus 58 above).

Brooch-moulds

Apart, however, from these small finished items, the site finds which have done most to extend the known repertory of fine metalwork are the moulds from which jewellery has been cast. Thus from the Mote of Mark (Curle 1914) and Dunadd (Campbell & Lane 1993) come moulds for G2 penannulars; and, a particularly interesting variant from

131  
Miscellaneous  
ornamental pieces:  
multi-coloured  
glass inlay (1) from  
Mote of Mark;  
glass inlay (2) from  
Dumbarton; glass  
trinkets (3, 4) and  
silvered-bronze  
dangle (8) from  
Dundurn; partial  
engraving of a  
penannular brooch  
(5) and enamelled  
bronze mount (7)  
from Dunadd; tin-  
bronze trinket (6)  
from Clatchard  
Craig; gold inlay  
(9) Bamburgh.

Dunadd, moulds of similar size with terminals in the form of confronted eagles' heads. There are also moulds for larger, panelled brooches, and also, possibly, for the decorated panels which would have been inset in the recesses cast in such brooches (Curle 1914, figs 11 & 12, moulds 1 & 3; Laing 1993, 95-97, nos 199, 201). These, which were discovered during Curle's excavation at the Mote of Mark, would have borne interlace in cast relief, as opposed to the filigree at Hunterston. Fragments of a mould for a large panelled penannular brooch were found at Clatchard Craig (Close-Brooks 1986, 163, illus 25); and Dunadd also yielded a mould for a brooch with a rather similar pattern on its terminals (Campbell & Lane 1993, 58-9). Both moulds have been compared with an actual brooch from Clunie, but there is a major difference. The Clatchard Craig and Dunadd moulds would have created recessed areas (bounded by ridges as in the Hunterston brooch) in which filigree-decorated panels were inset; but on the Clunie brooch the ornament was an integral part of the casting.

The comparison between the Clatchard and Dunadd moulds has a wider interest. Given such close similarities, in terms of both pattern and technique, between a mould from Dál Riata Dunadd and one from Pictish Clatchard Craig, we must doubt the value of fine metalwork as an indicator of 'national' (in Bede's sense of *gentes*) affiliation. Of course, such similarities may well have been transmitted by the movement of jewellers; but that explanation does nothing to diminish scepticism about the use of 'national' labels. There are also implications here for the use of the terms 'Irish' or 'of Irish type'. These are widely used in the literature wherever the actual provenance of an object may have been. They are deliberately avoided here, for obvious reasons.

### Militaria

Given the essentially warlike character of Early Historic society in northern Britain, one large class of objects is strikingly absent from the inventory of fine metalwork: namely, *militaria*. From the evidence of Sutton Hoo, we might have expected the northern inventory to include ornamented sword hilts, scabbards and harness gear, and apotropaic fittings, in the form of dragons and eagles, for shields. Even helmets might be expected from the evidence of the helmeted warriors on the Aberlemno churchyard sculpture (above, illus 45).



132  
Dalmeny, West  
Lothian: filigree-  
and-garnet  
ornament for a  
sword harness  
(*National Museums  
of Scotland*).

In fact, the only object in this class appears to be a pyramidal ornament from a sword harness, found in obscure circumstances at Dalmeny, overlooking the Firth of Forth (illus 132). Apart from the interest of its provenance, at the extreme northern reach of Anglian territory, it is a striking piece of gold-work, with inlaid plate garnets and filigree, worthy of ornamenting the sword of a noble warrior. To judge by southern examples, it may well mark a princely grave of the 7th century (Dickinson 1974 (misleading in relation to location and original account); Alcock 1993, 41 & fig 15).

### 19.2.3 Religious artefacts

#### Relics associated with St Cuthbert

The most important group of religious artefacts within the scope of this study is that associated with St Cuthbert (Battiscombe 1956a). Unfortunately, the history of the Cuthbert relics from the time of the saint's burial at Lindisfarne in AD 687 until their final examination in 1899 is both complicated and obscure. As early as 698, the orig-

inal coffin was opened, and the body was found to be incorrupt. At that time it was placed in a new coffin (discussed below, 22.3.1), and other items may have been added. In all, there were six such recorded openings. Moreover, in reaction to Viking raids and other disturbances, between the 840s AD and 1104, the coffin and relics were often moved from Lindisfarne until they finally came to rest at Durham.

Despite this, certain items can with reasonable confidence be attributed to the original burial in AD 687, or the first opening in 698. Prime among these in the inventory of fine metalwork is a pectoral cross of gold and garnet cloisons, which was almost certainly placed among Cuthbert's garments in 687. It shows signs of wear, and indeed the lower arm had been broken and repaired. All this suggests a date of manufacture a little after 650 (col illus I.9).

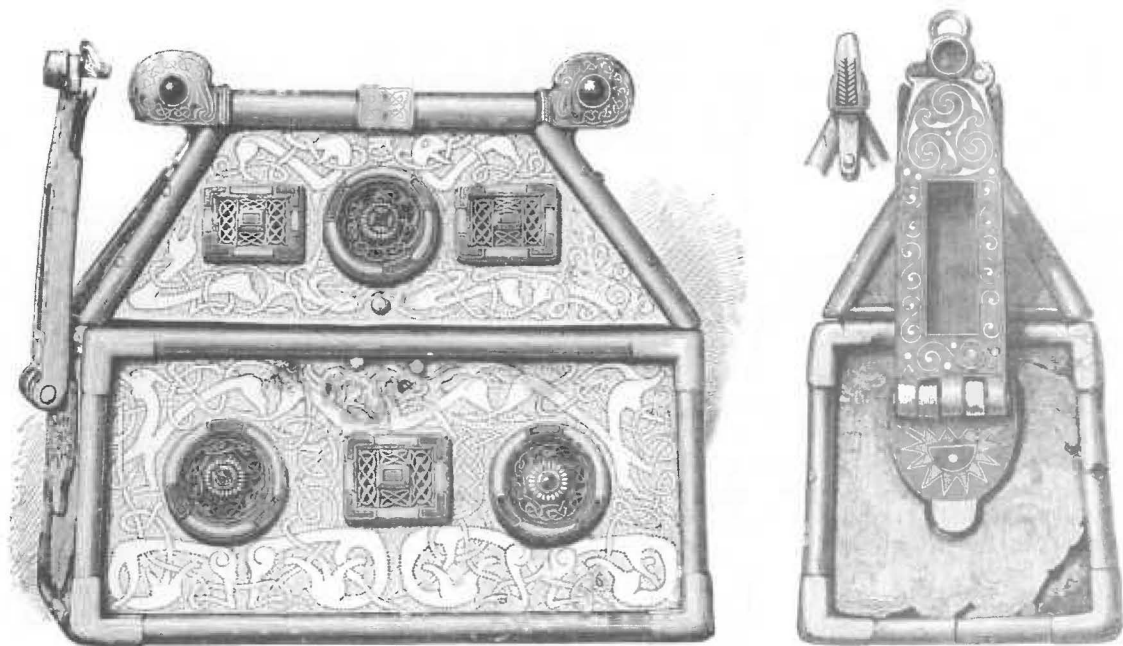
Compared with earlier gold-and-garnet crosses in southern England, this cross is distinguished by its slender arms with narrow cells framed in cast dog-tooth ornament. On the other hand, the central boss—a round garnet, encircled with filigree and set in a ring of some white material—recalls the central feature of the rich composite disc brooches of southern English cemeteries. Detailed examination of the geometry of the brooch shows that the curves of the arms are not simple arcs of a circle, but double arcs; and overall the layout shows affinities with the complicated geometry of some of the designs in the decoration of Gospel books. But despite its sophisticated geometry, the cross—like the Dalmeny pyramid—is an extremely conservative example of 'Germanic'-derived filigree and garnet cloisonné work without a hint of zoomorphic interlace or Celtic spirals.

In addition to the image of the cross itself, the iconography is of considerable interest. The central boss, combined with the four small garnets at the junctions of the arms, recall the Five Wounds of Christ; and each arm has 12 garnets for the 12 apostles. This analysis could probably be extended (Coatsworth 1989; O'Sullivan & Young 1995, 58-66 & colour pl 9; Webster & Backhouse 1991, 133-4 with colour plate).

### The Monymusk reliquary

The second religious object to be described here is the Monymusk reliquary. Although it lacks the prestige of an assured historical connection, it is an attractive piece of workmanship, and it has wide liturgical implications and legendary associations as well (illus 133). The reliquary is a nearly complete example of a type which is known in Ireland, and which also occurs as far as Italy—for instance in the famous monastery at Bobbio, whither it had been carried by missionaries.

Characteristically, the Monymusk example is carved from wood, in the form of a hip-roofed house, with a prominent roof-tree and finials. A similar house occurs in the 8th-century Book of Kells (folio 202v), where it depicts the Temple of Jerusalem, and, rather later, others appear on Irish high crosses. The wooden core of a reliquary may be either plated, as at Monymusk, or inlaid with metal. As the term implies, the reliquaries were used to house the remains of saints, principally bones. While they might normally repose on the altar, they were also carried in processions which might be liturgical, secular—on circuit to gather church dues—and even military, to bless an army before battle. On such processions, they would be carried by neck straps, and consequently the back is normally plainer than the front.



133  
The Monymusk  
reliquary (*ECMS*).

The side walls and roof of the Monymusk reliquary are plated with silver sheets held by tubular bronze strips. The silver plates are embellished with loosely linked biting beasts, reserved against a stippled ground. Similar stippled work is known on bowls no 2 and 3 in the St Ninian's Isle treasure, and this is held to mark a Pictish element in the reliquary. However, it is also known in the Lindisfarne Gospels, uniquely at the beginning of Mark's Gospel (f 95: col illu II.8; Wilson 1973, 128-9). We shall also shortly see that the Monymusk roof tree has birds' heads with good Lindisfarne analogies, a further caution against too readily invoking Pictish influences.

The animals surround—but are not infringed by—two rectangular and one circular medallion on the roof, and two circular and a rectangular one on the side wall. These are of gilt bronze with rectangular enamel settings round the rim, enclosing relief interlace and central bosses. One end of the reliquary still retains a hinged attachment for the carrying strap, which has S- and peltaic scrolls in red champlevé enamel, and a yellow sunburst motif at the base. It is assumed that there was a similar fitting, now lost, at the other end (Anderson 1881, frontispiece & 247-50 is preferred illustration, here as illustration 133; Youngs 1989, 134-5 & col illu 163 loses details).

From this description of the decoration of the end and side walls and the roof of the Monymusk shrine, we may concur with Ryan's comment on 'the remarkable correspondence between the decoration of religious objects and personal ornaments' (1989a, 130). On the other hand, in the light of the analysis of the Hunterston brooch above, we may question a too rigid division between Ryan's two categories. An analysis of the roof tree and finials at Monymusk—which has so far been deferred—may prompt a more subtle appreciation. The finials bear zoomorphic interlace around a circular red boss. The interlace takes the form of an animal head, with the foot curved under the head. What is this animal? A dragon may seem possible, although a bird's beak seems more likely. The vicious curl suggests an eagle, yet the supposed cormorants of the

Lindisfarne Gospels are quite similar. Despite these uncertainties, we can at least stress that the birds are looking inwards and are therefore in a protective mode. Moreover, they are protecting not merely the saint's bones, but the most precious of all Christian symbols: the Cross itself. For that, as Stevenson has demonstrated, is what the central interlace represents (Stevenson 1983, 473). (There are also two simpler interlace crosses on each of the rectangular medallions).

So far, we have been concerned with the visible features of the Monymusk reliquary, albeit with appropriate attention to its immediate symbolism. But in an early account, Anderson argued that 'it answers in every single particular to the description which I have deduced as typical of such a *vexillum*' (that is, battle standard) 'as the Breckennoch of St Columba' (Anderson 1881, 248). This interpretation has since been affirmed, and indeed expanded to the claim that the reliquary 'may date from the closing years of Adomnán's rule on Iona' (that is, towards AD 700, an acceptable date on typological grounds) (Smyth 1984, 136). Following the line of reasoning begun by Anderson, it seems likely that, as the Breckennoch of St Columba, it was carried round the Scottish army on the eve of the battle of Bannockburn. In regard to Columba's reputation as a saint of battles, we should recall here the dream or vision of Columba which had inspired Oswald to his victory over Cadwallon at the battle of Heavenfield (VC, 8b-9a).

19.3 EQUIPMENT, WORKPLACES AND CRAFTSMEN

Finally we may turn to more technical aspects of how such fine metal objects were manufactured, and how the craft was organized (for a comprehensive and well-illustrated account of contemporary metalworking in the Merovingian and Carolingian realms see Roth 1986). The recovery of crucibles and moulds for metalworking from excavations on Early Historic sites in northern Britain was first reported at, respectively, Dunadd in 1905 and Mote of Mark in 1914. Subsequent discoveries have been intermittent, and some important ones remain unpublished. A summary account can conveniently be tabulated.

Site	Crucibles	Moulds	Misc
1 <i>Alt Clut</i> , Dumbarton	•		inlays
2 Buiston	+ *	+ ingot	
3 Clatchard Craig	+	• * pin moulds	+ ?tuyère
4 Craig Phadraig	+ *		
5 Dunadd	• * handled & lidded	• * ingot & pin	• * motif piece
6 Dundurn	+	+ *	inlays, motif piece
7 Dunollie	+	+ * ingot & pin	+ tuyère
8 Hartlepool	+ ?lidded	+ *	
9 Iona	+ handled	•	
10 Mote of Mark	•	• * ingot & pin	+ inlays

Table 7  
Fine metalworking  
in northern Britain

Key: + present; • common; ? questionable; \* illustrated

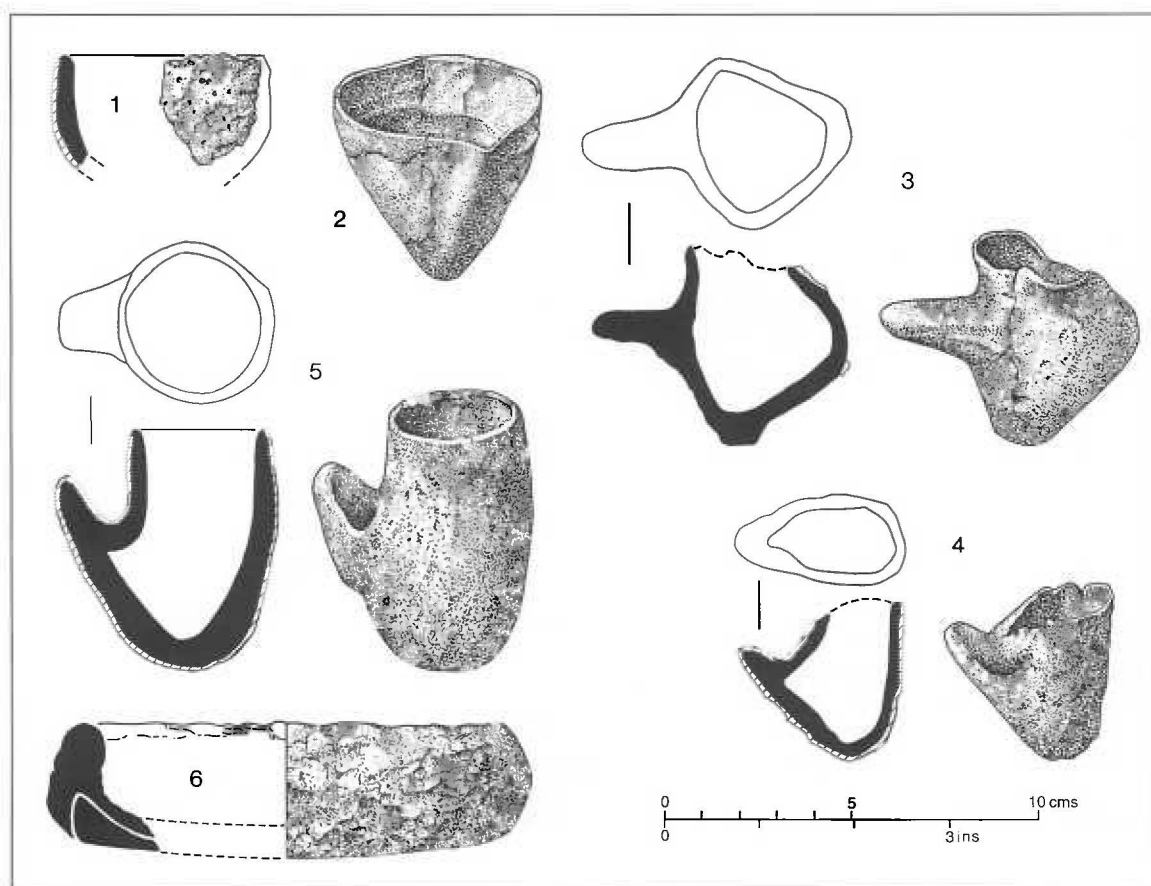
References: 1) Alcock & Alcock 1990. 2) Munro 1882. 3) Close-Brooks 1986a. 4) Stevenson 1976a, fig 2e. 5) Christison & Anderson 1905; Craw 1930; RCAHMS 1988, 154-6; Campbell & Lane 1993. 6) Alcock *et al* 1989. 7) Alcock & Alcock 1987. 8) Daniels 1988. 9) Graham-Campbell 1981; McCormick 1992. 10) Curle 1914.

Meanwhile, other important discoveries from Ireland and elsewhere in Britain have been published, notably at Ballinderry Crannog no 2 (Hencken 1942); Garranes ring fort (Ó Riordáin 1942); Garryduff ring fort I (O'Kelly 1962); Dinas Powys fort (Alcock 1963); Brough of Birsay (Curle 1982); Moynagh Lough crannog (Bradley 1993). These, and other less prolific sites, have been taken into account as a background to the evidence from northern Britain (for a wider study of Celtic metalwork, 6th-9th cents AD see Craddock 1989).

### 19.3.1 Crucibles

Some Early Historic crucibles (illus 134) have a simple cup-shape, others are of a triangular conical form, rather similar to a common type of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. But from the first season of excavation at Dunadd, it was recognized that some crucibles of post-Roman date were distinguished by having handles, either at right angles to the body of the pot, or sloping up at about 45° (Christison & Anderson 1905, figs 36-38). Moreover, in the second, 1929, season, Craw discovered another variant, the lidded crucible (Craw 1930, fig 8.5). Subsequent excavations in both Britain and Ireland have shown this to be widely distributed. It is considered that the intention was to reduce heat-loss and oxidation in the molten metal. The body of these crucibles is often notably sandy or gritty, and much care and skill must have gone into producing a suitably refractory material.

134  
Crucibles from  
Dunollie (1) and  
Dunadd (2);  
handled crucibles  
from Dunadd (3-  
5); shallow crucible  
or heating tray  
from *Alt Clut* (6).



Another possible crucible form, known only from *Alt Clut* (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 114, illus 13.54) and Mote of Mark (Curle 1914, 157-9, figs 18-19), consists of a large, shallow bowl of rather coarse fired clay, round, oval or subrectangular in plan. One example from Mote of Mark was externally blistered, suggesting exposure to great heat, but this was not the case with the *Alt Clut* examples. Although it has been suggested that these were heating trays, they do not match the examples from Ireland cited in Craddock 1989 (espec 181 & 185); indeed, it is doubtful if any heating trays have been discovered on the British mainland.

### 19.3.2 Moulds and casting processes

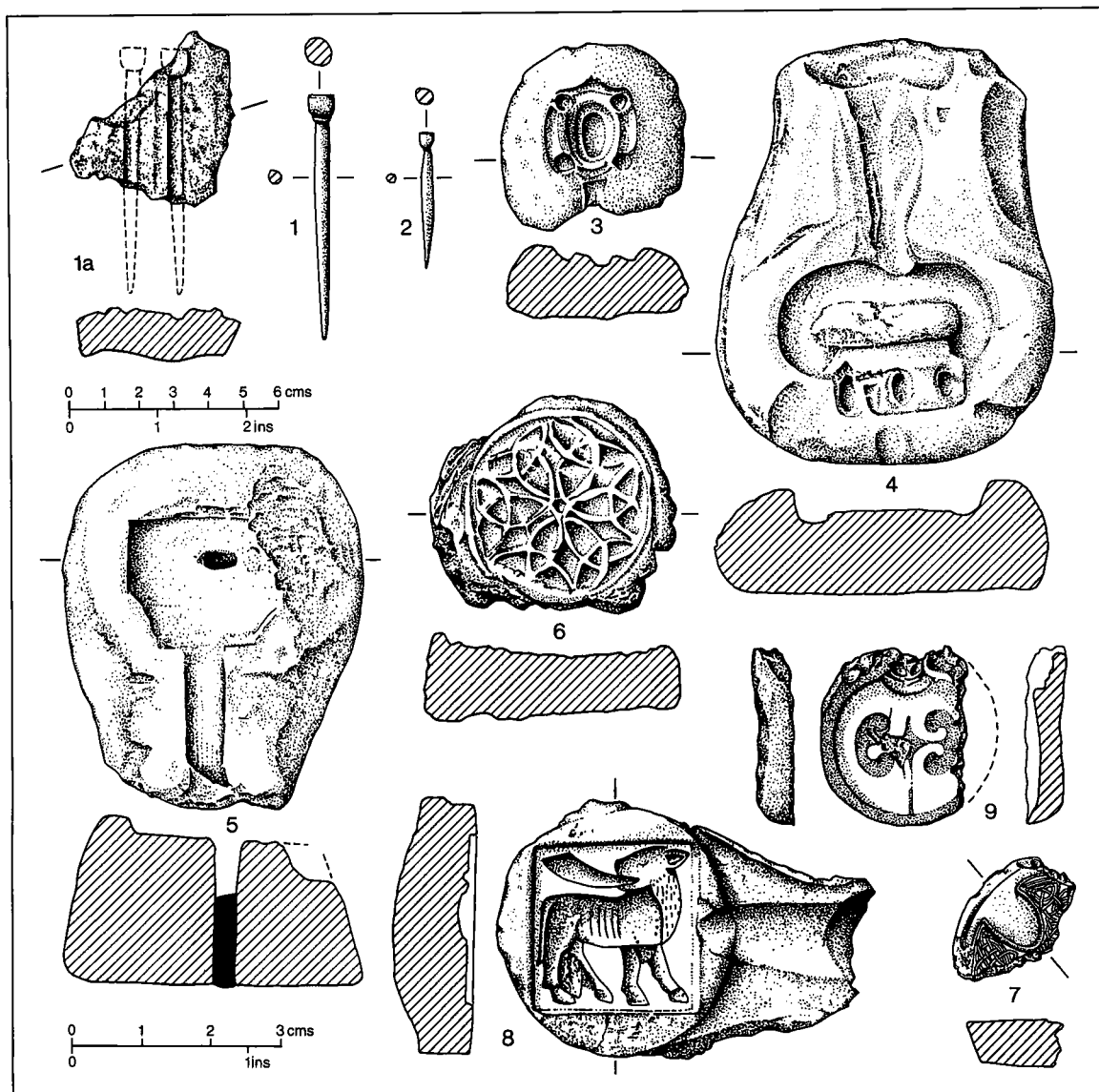
Some of the classes of objects, especially jewellery, which might have been produced in the moulds found on excavations have already been described. To these may be added some further utilitarian, decorative and ecclesiastical items (illus 135). Commonest of all are pins up to 50mm long, with bulbous or simple nail heads. While some moulds are for single pins, one at Mote of Mark was for a dozen (Curle 1914, fig 14.4). The cast bronze pins copy very closely pins of bone, and it can be shown that bone examples had been used as dies for forming the mould. It is difficult to imagine what these pins, whether of bone or metal, were used for, because they seem too short to have served either as hair or dress pins.

From Dundurn comes a mould for a pin with an oval head ornamented with four bosses. The mould has broken at the top of the stem, so the length of the original pin is unknown. Dunollie has produced, in addition to pin moulds, one which served for both a pin and a small ring. Altogether more substantial are moulds for belt buckles, one with traces of silver, from Dunadd (Campbell & Lane 1993, fig 6.5). In monastic contexts, from Iona come three moulds for fabricating circular glass inlays, ornamented with six overlapping circles (perhaps intended for an elaborate marigold pattern?). The moulds have evidently been produced from a single die (Graham-Campbell 1981, fig III.1b).

In terms of religious significance, however, the most important moulds are two from Hartlepool. One was for a disk containing a cross with expanded terminals with interlace decoration in relief. More significant is a square mould, probably for one of a set of four plaques. The present design shows a hornless quadruped, looking back over its shoulder, and blowing a trumpet (or more correctly, a horn). The iconography is open to debate; but the preferred interpretation is that this is not the Lamb of God, symbol of Christ, but rather the calf (*vitulus*), which was adopted in Insular manuscripts as the symbol of the Evangelist Luke (Cramp & Daniels 1987; Daniels 1988). Whatever the correct interpretation, this is undoubtedly a major addition to the Insular repertory.



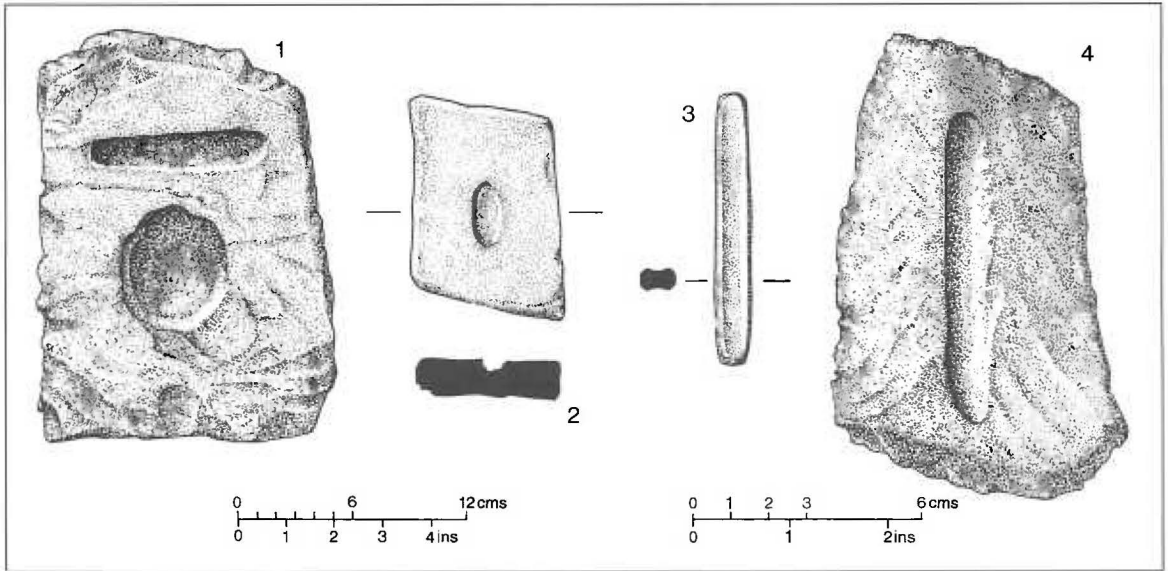
Following this account of the objects which were being cast, a brief description should be given of the moulds themselves. These were normally two-part, or bivalve moulds. Briefly, these were formed by slicing a lump of slightly sandy clay, so as to produce two flat surfaces. One side of a die, or even a previous casting, was pressed into one surface, which was then allowed to dry; the other surface was then pressed against the rear of the die. Protrusions and corresponding nicks keyed the two surfaces together after the die had been removed. A funnel-like extension, or gate, at one side of the mould, allowed molten metal to be poured in. After this had set, the mould was broken open and discarded (extended account in Craddock 1989, 170-1; good illustrations of moulds and gates in Close-Brooks 1986, illus 23-6).



135  
Various moulds and their products: pin-mould and pins (1, 2) from Dunollie; elaborate pin-head mould (3) from Dundurn; buckles (4, 5) from Dunadd; glass mould (6) from Iona; fragment of cross (7), and calf (?) blowing a horn, possibly symbol of St Luke (8) from Hartlepool; attachment for hanging-bowl mould (9) from Craig Phadraig.

Another important group of moulds consists simply of a flat stone with a wide groove or channel carved in the surface: the ingot mould (illus 136). These are believed to have been used to produce readily portable ingots, most commonly of silver, rarely of gold, occasionally of bronze. The grooves are normally parallel-sided with square cross-section, though round and oval plans are known, as are semi-circular cross-sections. There appears to be no standardization of size.

An actual silver ingot was found at Clatchard Craig (Close-Brooks 1986, illus 28.121; here illus 136, 3). Apart from the examples from excavations, tabulated above, there are interesting associations for a



casual find of an ingot mould on the slopes of East Lomond, Fife. The hill is crowned with fortifications, within which a stone plaque carved in Pictish style with an ox has been found. Moreover, on the lower ground to the south of the hill, a vein of lead, described as 'very rich', was exploited in the 18th and early 19th centuries—although there appears to be some doubt as to whether it was argentiferous.

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Ingot moulds: 1, 2 & 4: stone moulds from Buiston, Dunollie, and Dunadd; 3, silver ingot from Clatchard Craig.

### 19.3.3 Inlays, glass and enamel

Table 7 above also registers rods and inlays. We have already noticed the moulds for making glass inlays at Iona. At Mote of Mark, Curle records a roughly oval plaque of green glass, 22mm by 19mm, and 6mm thick (illus 132, 1). One face is embellished with irregularly-placed spots of white and yellow enamel. This appears to have been set in a metal mount (Curle 1914, 156, fig 17.13). From *Alt Clut* and Dundurn come respectively a tear-drop-shaped and an oval object of brown or olive green glass, each intended for a brooch, casket or other decorated metal object, as a substitute for the common amber or gemstone inlays. Another form of inlay consisted of slices of coloured glass rods, especially millefiori. Examples are common in Ireland, and are also known at Dinas Powys (Craddock 1989, spec 201-4; Alcock 1963, 186-7), but seem to be rare in northern Britain. Rods of blue and of white glass have, however, been reported from the excavation of the small fort of Castlehill, Dalry, Ayr (Smith 1919).

An outstanding example of the glassworker's virtuosity comes from Dundurn (Alcock *et al* 1989, illus 14.26; here illus 132, 4). This is a dome-shaped glass boss, which is decorated overall with irregular swirls of white and dark brown glass. This basic pattern is inlaid with five vitreous discs and surmounted by five lesser bosses, all with blue and white spirals. A bronze tube is set into the base in order to fix the boss to some larger object, secular or religious, such as a sword hilt, goblet, chalice, cross or reliquary.

Motif-pieces are included in the table above. They range from designs scratched—often rather carelessly—on smooth pieces of stone to carefully executed examples of interlace patterns, deeply carved on animal bones. The former are sometimes known as sketch-

pads, whereas the latter may have been dies for impressing the patterns onto clay moulds. Motif-pieces are quite rare in Britain, but very common in Ireland, most probably because excavations of Early Medieval sites are so much more common there (O'Meadhra 1979; 1987, espec section 2).

However that may be, the best example in northern Britain is from Dunadd (illus 132, 5). It is a design for a bossed penannular brooch, incised by compass on a piece of slate. The layout consists of a circular boss within an oval on the hoop, and five bosses on one terminal. These are carefully drawn, but the other terminal is blank. This may have been a sketch-pad, intended to demonstrate the pattern of a brooch for a prospective patron (Christison & Anderson 1905, 311 with inaccurate illustration, fig 31; Craddock 1989, 177).

### 19.3.4 Workplaces and practices

Finally, we must examine the value of evidence from excavations in providing information about actual workplaces and working practices. It will have been noticed from Table 7 above that there are curious inconsistencies in these records. For instance, *Alt Clut* produces crucibles, but no moulds, whereas Clatchard Craig has very abundant moulds, but only dubious evidence for crucibles. (This observation from northern British sites may be reinforced by a wider survey: Alcock 1987a, 112). Moreover, although the finds may be stratified in chronologically significant layers, these layers only rarely include hearths and ovens, or other evidence of actual working practices.

We must also ask how representative are the known locations in relation to the normal siting of workplaces? The evidence tabulated above suggests that fine metalworking took place in monasteries, and in the defended and enclosed places of potentates. Indeed, there might appear to be a kind of socially determined correlation between high rank, the patronage of fine metalwork, and the ability to command a warband and other clients. But this ignores the bias in the way that the evidence had been gathered: monasteries and forts are easily recognized, because they are enclosed places. Consequently, they are frequently excavated. The question is, how might we discover a metalworking emplacement that was not indicated by enclosing walls or other such markers?

A Merovingian example is relevant here. According to Dado's Life of Eligius, bishop of Noyon from AD 641, on one recorded occasion he was sitting *in defossum*—a deep digging, perhaps a sunken-floored dwelling or *Grubenhaus*; and opposite him was Thille, his household slave, of the Saxon race. What Eligius was doing in this humble-seeming situation was making many vessels of gold and jewels for the use of the king (*fabricabat in usu regis utensilia quam plurima ex auro et gemmis*: cited Roth 1986, 676) for Eligius was a famous goldsmith and moneyer to several Merovingian kings (James 1988, 196-7).

Unfortunately, his works for kings and church (except for his coins) appear all to have been destroyed in the French Revolution. But a painting exists of the jewelled cross which he made for the abbey of St Denis (Roth 1986, Taf 112), and there is likewise a drawing of the chalice which he made for the abbey of Chelles (Lasko 1971, fig 89; here illus 137). Both of these reveal him as a master of cloisonné work. That such an outstanding craftsman could be operating out of a hole in the ground leaves us with little confidence of our ability to discover the workplaces of Insular craftsmen.

There is another message to be taken from the example of Eligius: namely, the possible status to which a highly skilled craftsman might aspire, notwithstanding the dirty, even noisome, character of his workplace. This is consistent, of course, with the well-known colophon at the end of the Lindisfarne Gospels (20.3.2 below). Whatever reservations we might have about the chronological validity of that statement, we may reasonably believe that it faithfully represents the kind of persons who made the Gospels. It is no surprise that a bishop wrote and painted the work. What is more relevant here is that another bishop should have crafted the cover; and that Billfrith the anchorite should have been a craftsman skilled in working in gold, silver and gems. At that level at least, the anchorite was at one with the bishop of Noyon.



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Seventeenth-century drawing of so-called Chalice of St Eligius (*Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art*).

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## PAINTING

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### 20 .1 INTRODUCTORY

**W**ith its Jewish roots, and its Judaeo-Hellenistic social background, Christianity was inevitably a literate religion: like Judaism and Islam, a religion of The Book. In this case, The Book came to be known as The Bible, a word ultimately derived from the Greek *Ta Biblia*, meaning originally simply a strip of papyrus, then the writing on the papyrus. Our present understanding of the term, as the writings otherwise known as the Old and New Testaments, has developed over time (*Encyclopedia*, 120b).

As such, the Bible comprises the Hebrew Scriptures, which include the Psalms of David, of great importance for the liturgy of the early Insular church; the four Gospels of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; certain letters or Epistles, especially those of Paul to the young churches around the eastern Mediterranean and Rome, and an apocalyptic vision or Revelation. But the Bible itself came to be augmented, especially from the 4th century AD, by lives of the Desert Fathers and other saintly persons, by commentaries on the Bible text, by apologetics, by letters of encouragement and admonition to churches and individuals, and by penitentials and other disciplinary writings. Moreover, translations were made from the original Hebrew and Greek into Latin, a far more widely accessible language in Western Europe.

Part of the inheritance of Greek and Latin culture was a long tradition of adding miniature-painted illustrations to secular texts—poetic, narrative, philosophical, historical. As a consequence, from the 5th century it became the practice to add narrative paintings and supposed portraits to the holy writings, both of the Old Testament—Noah's flood being a popular topic, gruesomely presented—and of the New Testament, with the life of Christ being a favoured subject for extensive treatment. Moreover, some of the editorial apparatus such as Canon Tables came to be embellished both with ornamentation around the frame of the tables, and narrative miniatures outside them. In addition, from the 6th century, icons—especially portraits of the Virgin and Child, often accompanied by saints—were painted on wooden boards and displayed in churches as well as in processions.

From the time of Augustine's mission to Canterbury at the end of the 6th century AD, illuminated Gospels and other decorated books, as well as painted icons, were introduced to south-east Britain—no doubt they had reached Ireland decades earlier, and even before the Augustinian mission they must have been known on Iona. Such importations provided an important inspiration for Insular scribes, though it must be stressed that there were obvious and major differences between Insular painting, on the one hand, and the styles that were current elsewhere in Early Christian, Byzantine and Carolingian art.

Even allowing for major losses as a result especially of the Viking looting of monasteries, the remaining corpus of whole and fragmentary Insular books is large. Indeed, we may

reasonably infer that between about AD 650 and 825 the output of scribes and painters was prodigious. An interesting comparison may be made with the surviving output of metalworkers. The number of individual motifs on a fully illustrated page of a Gospel Book matches closely those on a great de-luxe brooch like that from Hunterston: Book of Durrow folio 1v (illus 138) has 57 motifs, folio 192v (illus II.4) 56 and Hunterston (illus 125) incorporates 61. A major manuscript would have six or more of such all-over illustrated pages (the fully-covered page design since termed 'carpet-pages').

With this wealth of artistic output, our treatment here must be very selective. We are not concerned with the verbal content of a manuscript—for instance, with the question of whether the text was a relatively pure version of St Jerome's Vulgate, or still retained elements of the earlier Old Latin Version. Nor shall we deal with the epigraphy; nor with editorial matters such as Jerome's preface, or the apparatus of the Canon Tables—that is, tables of concordance between the four gospels.

Instead, as with the treatment of fine metalwork in Chapter 19 and sculpture in Chapters 21 and 22, this chapter will deal basically with the artistic aspects of Insular painting, with some notice of liturgical and symbolic aspects. Moreover, it will concentrate on the three virtually complete Gospel Books which have northern connections: the Book of Durrow, the Lindisfarne Gospels, and the Book of Kells.

## 20. 2 THE BEGINNINGS

### 20.2.1 Mediterranean imports

Bede relates that, when king Æthelbert of Kent summoned Augustine and his companions to an audience, they carried before them a silver cross as a military-standard (*pro vexillo*), and an image of our Lord and Saviour painted on a board (*imaginem Domini Salvatoris in tabula depictam*, *HE* i, 25): in other words, a portable icon such as had recently appeared in the Mediterranean. Moreover, once the mission was established, Pope Gregory sent to Augustine, among other things necessary for the worship and ministry of the Church, relics of the holy apostles and martyrs and also many manuscripts, *codices plurimos* (*HE* i, 29).

None of the sacred vessels, relics, icons and other ecclesiastical apparatus which had been sent to Augustine has come down to us, with the possible exception of an Italian copy of the Gospels (Webster & Brown 1997, 234 with pl 30.) This had been decorated with miniature portraits of the four evangelists, each seated under an arch occupied by the symbol of that particular evangelist (col illus II.1). The arch was supported by a pair of columns on each side, and between the columns were scenes from Christ's ministry and life. Other pages had displayed biblical scenes.

In the following decades, as Christianity became established throughout Britain and Ireland, many icons and decorated books, especially Gospels, must have been introduced from Rome and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, and also from Gaul. It is not, however, until the 670s AD that we have near-contemporary evidence for such importations. Our source for this is Bede's *Lives of the Blessed Abbots*, the five successive abbots of his own monastery of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow (*VBA*). Though Bede was writing after 716 about events going back to c 670, he was able to draw on the oral witness and records of the monastery.

Our interest lies in the account of the third, fourth and fifth visits to Rome of Benedict Biscop, the first abbot. He was assiduous in bringing back holy relics, and especially books. Subsequently, Benedict's successor, Ceolfrith, also made large additions to the library, including three copies of Jerome's *Vulgate* (*VBA*, chap 15). From our knowledge of Early Christian books in the metropolitan centres of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Rome, we may be certain that many of those imported to Monkwearmouth and Jarrow were lavishly illustrated (Weitzmann 1977).

In addition to books and relics, Benedict brought back pictures of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the 12 apostles, and other saints from his fourth and fifth visits to Rome. These were distributed between the two houses of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, and were displayed programmatically. At Jarrow, for instance, the intention was to illustrate the relationship between the Old and New Testaments (*VBA*, chap 9). At Monkwearmouth, Bede explains that the intention was that even illiterate persons entering the church would be reminded of Christ and his saints, of Christ's Incarnation, and of the Last Judgement (*VBA*, chap 6).

### 20.2.2 Influence of the new images

Surprisingly, nothing has survived from this wealth of imported visual material, and it is difficult therefore to assess its real influence on Insular art. One specific example may be cited here. Bede records that Benedict brought back an image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, *Dei genetrix*, and implies that there was another referring to the Incarnation (*VBA*, chap 6). It seems likely that both of these were in fact representations of Mary and Child, an image already common in the Mediterranean in the 6th century (*Atlas*, 161, with illus 542-6; *Encyclopedia*, 539-540, with illus 217-8).

A common Mediterranean image showed Mary enthroned, flanked by angels or saints, with the Child on her lap. This is the image seen on St Oran's cross and St Martin's cross at Iona (RCAHMS 1982, 192-7 & 204-8; illus 171 below). Another possible example from Iona is that on folio 7v of the Book of Kells (col illus II.9). At Brechin there is a cross-head with Mary and Child surrounded by angels and evangelist symbols (*ECMS*, 249-50 with fig 261). On an end panel of Cuthbert's coffin is a carved outline of Mary and Child, without attendant saints or angels (Battiscombe 1965 a; illus 173 below). Finally, we should add Mary and Child in a scene of the Adoration of the Magi on the Frank's casket (eg Wilson 1984 pl 37; illus 175 below). This may seem to be a meagre corpus of northern British images based on Mediterranean models, but it is indeed the largest group derived from the New Testament.

From this it may appear that imported models had little influence on Insular art in the 7th and 8th centuries. Indeed, there are striking visual contrasts with the miniatures which decorated both Early Christian books from the Mediterranean, and also later ones from the Carolingian realms (compare illustrations in Weitzmann 1977 (Late Antique and Early Christian) and Mütherich & Gahde 1977 (Carolingian) with those in Nordenfalk 1977 (Insular)). In view of these contrasts, it is not surprising that the roots of Insular manuscript painting in northern Britain have mostly been sought elsewhere than in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, almost half a century ago, in looking for evidence 'Before the Book of Durrow', Nordenfalk (1947) pointed to a psalter traditionally known as the *Cathach*—that is, Battler or Warrior—of Columba. According to some accounts, this had been copied by Columba himself, implying a date in the mid-6th century (Byrne 1973, 95-6).

Subsequently, encased in a metal book-shrine, it had been carried into battle like the Monymusk reliquary. These quasi-historical legends are, to put it mildly, dubious evidence both for the date and for Columba's authorship. A cautious palaeographic opinion might prefer a date at 'around 600'; but even this may be influenced by the Columban legends.

### 20.2.3 Developments in style

Despite this, a typological judgement would be that the decoration of the *Cathach* is considerably simpler than that of the *Book of Durrow*, but it also foretells that of *Durrow*. It also looks back to Mediterranean models from the late 4th through the 6th centuries (Nordenfalk 1947, figs 9-11). Essentially the discussion turns on the decoration of the initial letters. In the case of the *Cathach*, the first three or four letters of each psalm are embellished, whereas in the Mediterranean models, only the first letter of a paragraph is decorated. In the *Cathach* these initials do not rise beyond the text, but are fully integrated with it; over the span of three or four letters, the height diminishes from left to right—an effect known as '*diminuendo*'. The Insular initials are flowing and curvilinear, with terminal scrolls suggesting strong Ultimate La Tène or Late Celtic (ie pre-Roman Iron-Age) influences. Moreover, some scrolls end in obvious or implied animal heads (eg Psalms 90 and 98; Nordenfalk 1947, fig 14). We should also notice that the *Cathach* follows from its models by placing miniature crosses in the voids or at the ends of letters, a feature which we shall see again in *Durrow*.

Nordenfalk also identified another typological step between the psalter and *Durrow*. This is represented by two leaves from a Gospel Book in Durham Cathedral Library, A.II.10, folios 2 and 3 v (Nordenfalk 1947 161-70; 1977, 14-5, col pl 1; Wilson 1984, 32-3 with col pls 10 & 11). The original provenance of the manuscript is unknown, and it is possible that it might have been written in Ireland, or on Iona, or in an Ionan foundation in Northumbria.

Folio 2 is the beginning of St Mark's Gospel (*Initium evangelium Jesu Christi filii Domini*: the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, son of God). The initial letters, I and the ascender of N, are two-fifths the overall height of the page, and the word INITIUM, mistakenly spelt INITITIUM, occupies the width of a column of text, with strongly marked *diminuendo*: plainly a typological stage beyond the *Cathach*. Celtic pelta-scrolls are present; the conjoined I and N ascender ends in an animal head of probable hanging-bowl ancestry and the cross-bar of the N is made up of two animal-headed scrolls which defy identification as either Celtic or Germanic. Between each of the three letters INI are thin bands of simple interlace, which fuse the letters together, reminiscent of a cut-out from a sheet of metal. This impression is reinforced by the coloured rectangular cells of the ascenders, variously coloured blue, yellow, green and orange-red, as though the letters were a pattern in cloisonné enamel.

Turning now to folio 3v, the left-hand column contains the colophon at the end of Matthew's Gospel. The right-hand column is in the form of three D-shaped frames, formed from wide bands of interlace with triquetral knots in the spandrels, and curious animal-snouted peltas at the top and bottom corners. The two lower frames contain the Greek text of the Lord's Prayer, written in Latin characters. The interlace is more complicated than that on folio 2, and indeed three different patterns are present. A visually striking feature is that the wide yellow bands are further enriched with double rows of red dots.

Nordenfalk lays much emphasis on the interlace in Durham A.II.10 as an innovation in Insular decoration, and originally looked to Byzantine and Italian art for its source. But in 1977 he acknowledged 'a skilled use of interlace...on certain objects from Sutton Hoo' (Nordenfalk 1977, 14). This view has been strongly reinforced by Wilson, who rightly points out that the ornament of the D-shaped frames in folio 2 'might well be based on the designs of 7th-century nielloed gold' (Wilson 1984, 33); and, it might be added, filigree. In this respect, Sutton Hoo is merely the best-known example of dotted interlace in Anglo-Saxon metalwork. These hints of inspiration from Celtic and Germanic metalwork will be amplified when, in the next section, we consider the decoration of the *Book of Durrow*.

### 20.3 THE FLOWERING OF INSULAR PAINTING: DURROW, LINDISFARNE, KELLS

The most vivid and revealing way to demonstrate the quality, variety and symbolism of painting in the Insular Gospel books is by examining in some depth the three major works which have been preserved in a more-or-less complete state. These are the works normally known as the Book of Durrow, the Lindisfarne Gospels, and the Book of Kells. Although their precise dates are not agreed, they may be placed respectively in the mid-7th century, the end of the 7th century, and perhaps the end of the 8th century (or perhaps the early 9th). Whatever the precise date, they represent a sequence from Primitive experimental, through a Classical, mature and formal phase, to an exuberantly inventive 'Baroque'. All three are attributed to monastic scriptoria with Columban/Ionan associations, but only the Lindisfarne Gospels can be firmly located. The other two may originate from Iona, or from their eponymous monasteries in Ireland (major study with copious illustrations: G Henderson 1987).

#### 20.3.1 The Book of Durrow

The Book of Durrow is now a volume of 248 folios (though a few may have been lost), measuring 245 x 145 mm (9.5 x 5.75in), with a Latin text which is substantially that of St Jerome's Vulgate. Our interest focuses on five (perhaps originally six) carpet-pages (folios with all-over decoration), plus five folios with symbols of the Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and a number of pages with elaborately decorated initial letters, for instance at the opening of individual gospels (accessible colour illustrations: B Meehan 1996).

The placing of these folios at significant points in the text makes it clear that they were not mere embellishments, but were an essential feature of its construction. It begins with a carpet-page (folio 1v) with three variations on pure ribbon interlace, framing a central panel which features a double-armed cross, coloured yellow (illus 138). This cross is itself made up of eight subordinate crosses, while the corners of the frame are each occupied by a stepped cross with interlace ornament, thus making in all 12 crosses for the 12 disciples. It has been shown that the 'construction of the central panel...resembles the carpet-page at the beginning of a Persian codex', and that 'obviously both depend upon a common Early Christian archetype' (Nordenfalk 1977, 19-20; 35). The whole composition of folio 1v can also be analysed in terms of contemporary Insular metalwork, as is also the case with other painted pages.

The next page (folio 2r), continues the theme of the cross, in this case a cross with



II.1  
St Augustine's Gospels, fol. 129:  
portrait of St Luke  
(*Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*)

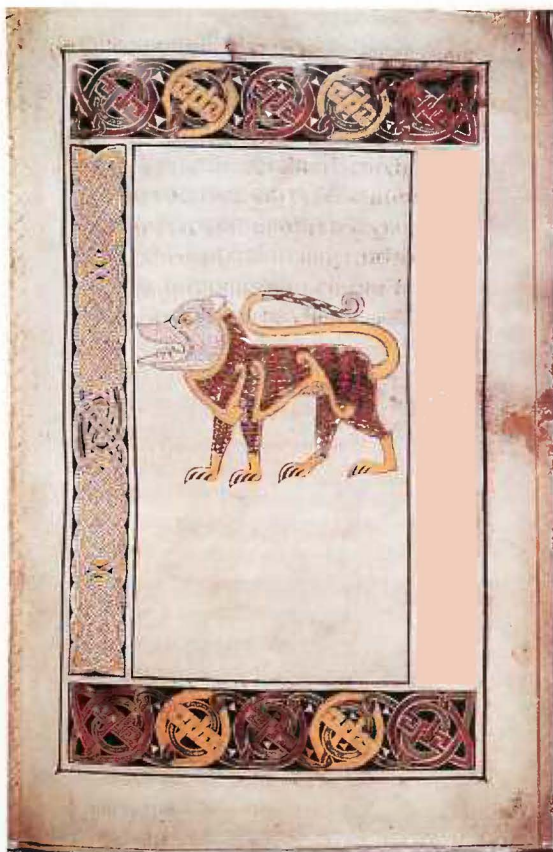


II.2  
Durrow, fol. 3v: carpet-page  
(*Trinity College Library Dublin*)

II.3

Durrow, fol. 191v: Lion as symbol of  
St John

(Trinity College Library Dublin)



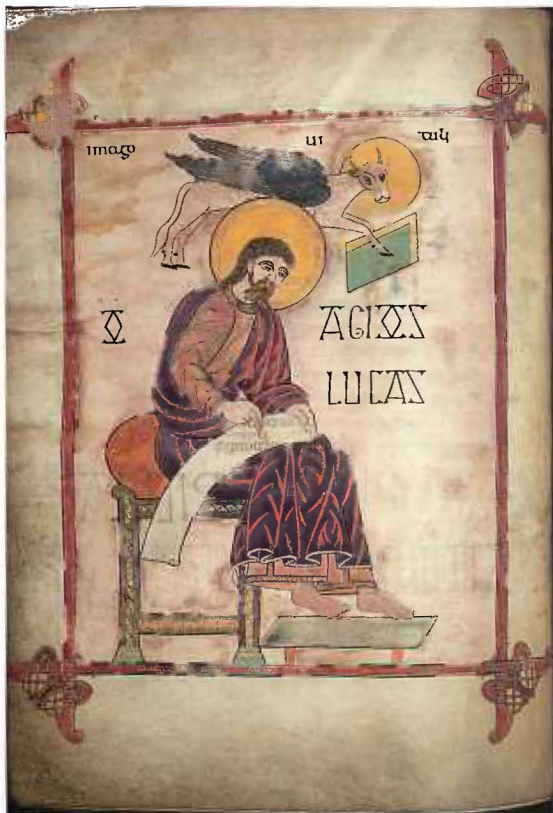
II.4

Durrow, fol. 192v: carpet-page, with  
central cross, surrounded by  
interlaced animals

(Trinity College Library Dublin)



II.5  
 Durrow, fol. 86r: opening  
 of St Mark's Gospel  
 (Trinity College Library Dublin)



II.6  
 Lindisfarne Gospels, fol. 137v:  
 portrait of St Luke  
 (British Library)



II.7  
Lindisfarne, fol. 2v: carpet-page  
(*British Library*)



II.8  
Lindisfarne, fol. 29: St Matthew's  
account of Christ's birth  
(*British Library*)



II.9  
Book of Kells, fol. 7v: Virgin and Child  
(Trinity College Library Dublin)



II.10  
Kells, fol. 27v: four evangelist symbols  
(Trinity College Library Dublin)



II.11  
Kells, fol. 32v: portrait of Christ  
(Trinity College Library Dublin)



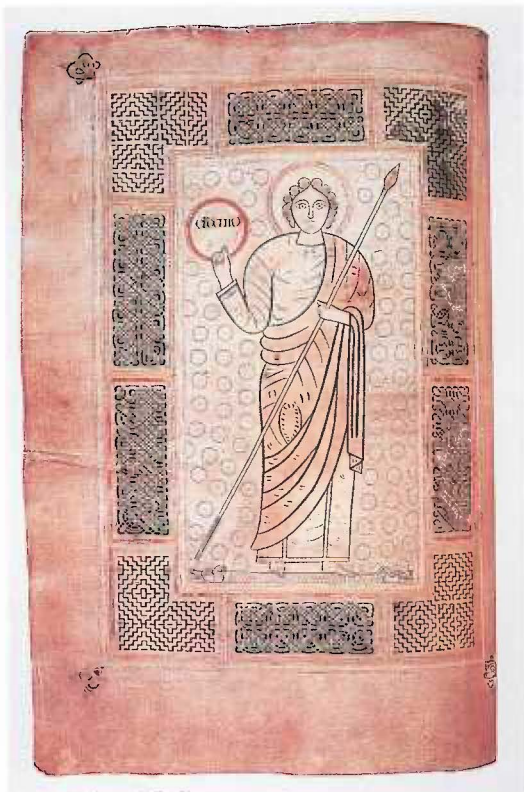
II.12  
Kells, fol. 34: Matthew's account of  
Christ's birth (Matt, 1:18)  
(Trinity College Library Dublin)



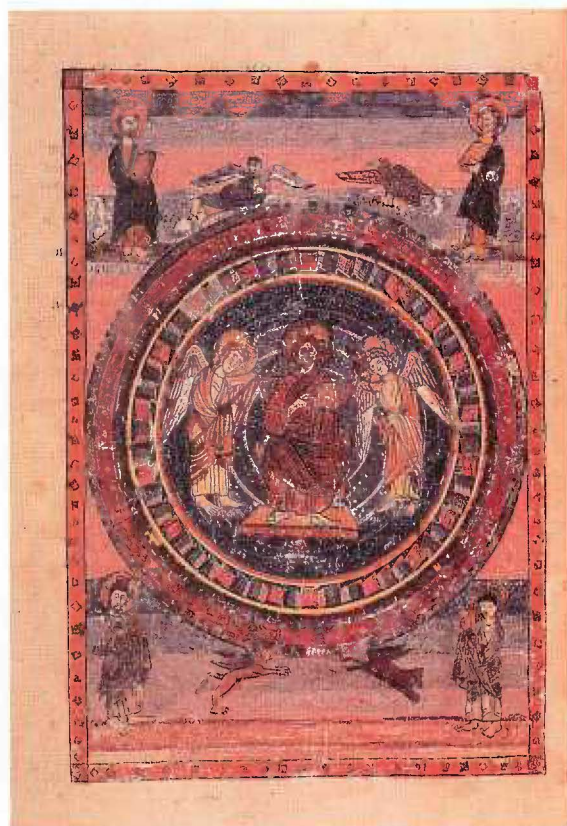
II.13  
Kells, fol. 130: Mark's account of the  
good new of Jesus Christ (Mark, 1:1)  
(Trinity College Library Dublin)



II.14  
Kells, fol. 33: carpet-page  
(Trinity College Library Dublin)



II.15  
Durham Cassiodorus: David as a warrior  
(Dean & Chapter, Durham Cathedral Library)



II.16  
*Codex Amiatinus*: Christ in majesty with two  
angels; four evangelists and their symbols in  
corners.

Copied at the Monkwearmouth-Jarrow  
scriptorium from the *Codex Grandior*  
(Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana).

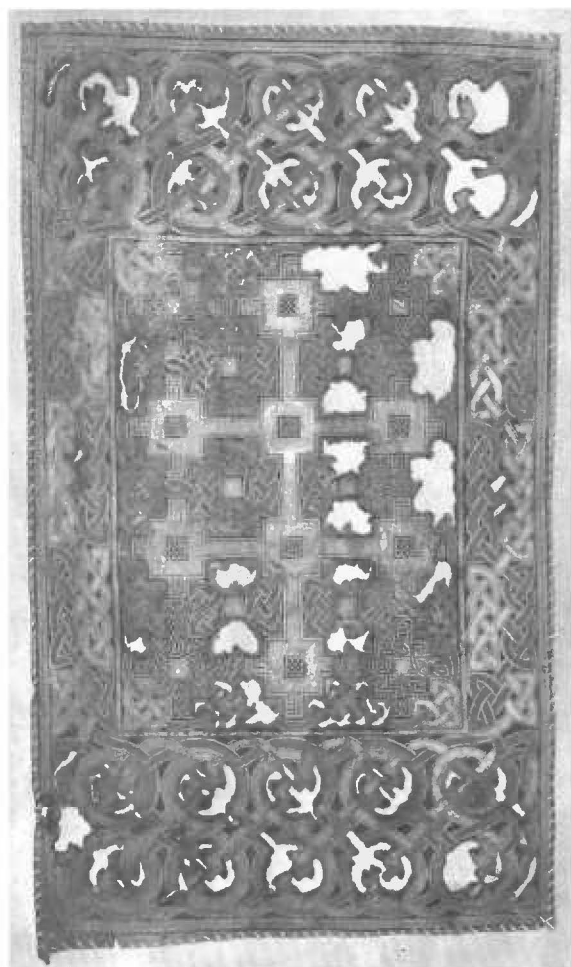
expanded terminals, the stem, arms and terminals being infilled with panels of interlace. Around the cross are gathered the symbols of the four Evangelists: Man, Eagle, Ox (or Calf) and Lion. These occupy a central rectangle, bordered with a key- or maze-pattern frame, imitating cloisonné work. The placing of the symbols around the cross recalls the four living creatures encircling the slain Lamb—that is the crucified Christ—of *The Book of Revelation*, 5.6 (Henderson, G 1987, 42-3).

A second carpet-page occupies folio 3v. This displays two strikingly contrasted themes: a broad border with a disciplined ribbon interlace in three colours, creating a series of round motifs; and an inner rectangle, equally disciplined, but creating a riot of Celtic scrolls (col illus II.2). These are arranged in an upper and a lower group, each filled with one large and two smaller roundels, linked by trumpets and hairspring-spiral scrolls. The roundels themselves are filled with similar scrolls, trumpets and peltae. A major feature, occurring six times, is the grouping of scrolls or peltas in threes, reinforcing the major arrangement of the two groups of three roundels: an emphasis on a trinitarian theme. A minor element is a suggestion, or reminiscence, of the bird-headed scrolls which we have already noticed in the metalwork. Altogether, this is an outstanding example of Celtic 'hanging-bowl' style, liberated from the hard constraints of metal by the greater freedom of pen- and brush-work.

There follows the prefatory matter of Jerome's prologue and the Canon Tables which set out the parallels between the four Gospels. The main text then begins (folio 21v) with a painted page of the Man as symbol of St Matthew (illus 139), followed by the list of the 42 generations of Christ's genealogy. The Gospel proper then begins (Matt, 1:18): '*Xri (= Christi) autem generatio sic erat*: Christ's birth however was thus': the major statement of the Immaculate Conception, which requires the embellishment of *Christi autem*. We shall find this treatment becoming progressively elaborated in Lindisfarne and Kells.

It seems likely that a carpet-page has been lost at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, because the pattern for the other Gospels is: Evangelist symbol, carpet-page, text commencing with embellished lettering. Having established this pattern, we may now look at the painterly aspects of the other Gospels, leaving matters of symbolism and iconology to a later section (below, 20.6).

The Evangelist symbols all occupy a full page, with an interlace border framing the symbol itself. The borders demonstrate the great versatility of pure interlace, as well as the inventiveness of the artist, for each one differs from the others. The symbols, Man, Eagle, Ox (or Calf) and Lion, are all stylized to a greater or lesser extent, and make much



138  
Book of Durrow,  
fol 1v: carpet page  
(Trinity College  
Library Dublin).



139  
Durrow, fol.21v:  
Man as symbol of  
St Matthew  
(Trinity College  
Library Dublin).

Cross. That for Mark's Gospel (folio 85v) has a central medallion with a cross of interlace with expanded terminals, surrounded with 14 medallions of the same size, filled with typical Durrow interlace. The whole is then framed with a narrow border filled with thin interlaced bands infilled with dots, reminiscent of the niello-dotted interlace of the great gold buckle at Sutton Hoo (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 526 ff).

The most extraordinary of the carpet-pages is that for John's Gospel (folio 192v; col illus II.4). This has a central medallion with a plain expanded-terminal cross at its centre and three others of intricate cloisonné-work around the periphery. The medallion is infilled with typical Durrow broad-ribbon interlace. The most remarkable feature, however, is the framing of the medallion, for this consists of six panels of animal interlace, one at each side, and two each at top and bottom. The interlace is varied, including animals in procession or entwined, biting themselves or their neighbours. The parallels in imagery with the shoulder clasps at Sutton Hoo are obvious, and the whole effect is that of imitating cloisonné work on vellum. This is not to imply any direct link, but only

use of decoration derived from cloisonné and millefiori work. The Man (Matthew) for instance, wears a cloak with a 'millefiori' pattern (folio 21v; illus 139). He has an Irish, not Roman, tonsure, such as we see in the depiction of a bishop on a stele at Ballyvourney, Co Cork (O'Kelly 1952, pl vii.1; Henry, 1965, pl 50), and which survived into the early 8th century on Iona.

The eagle (symbolizing Mark in Durrow) is plainly descended from the Germanic cloisonné bird brooches of the 5th and later centuries which we have already seen in relation to Insular metalwork. The outer parts of the Durrow wings appear to mimic engraved metalwork, or possibly fine filigree. Little can be said of the bovine (Luke). The flowing tail of the Lion (symbolizing John in Durrow) recalls heraldic lions in western Asiatic textiles, and such a source cannot be ruled out (folio 191v; col illus II.3). But the Insular metalwork elements are plain: the cloisonné body, the punched dots on the head, and the engraved hatching towards the end of the tail, like that of the Eagle's wings. The general impression here, as elsewhere in Durrow, is that the artist is striving with pen and brush to mimic the familiar effects of metalwork, in order to produce images of power for which there were no pre-existing stereotypes.

Of the carpet-pages, two are of particular interest because their central theme is the

a common tradition, for which the accidents of discovery have presented us with rich examples from East Anglia, but not from Northumbria.

Finally we turn to the decorated initials at the beginning of each Gospel, or at a significant point in the text (eg folio 86; col illus II.5). The decoration is markedly different from that of the evangelist symbols and carpet-pages: the typical large-scale interlace of broad bands in red, yellow and green, with distinct borders, so typical of Durrow. Instead, there is delicate, small-scale interlace, often with a central line of red dots. This fills the centre of the risers of letters, while the cross-members, for instance of the letter N, are swollen with hairspring spirals, and, more rarely, trumpets and peltas. Similar ornaments sprout from the top and bottom of letters. Contour-dotting—the outlining of letters with red dots—is also common.

It is clear that the embellishment of the initials was done by the scribe responsible for writing the text. The text is carefully adjusted to fit around the asymmetrical shapes of the initials, and the initial letters of verses have similar contour-dotting. It is a reasonable deduction from these observations that the full-page spreads of evangelist symbols and carpet-pages were painted by artists other than the scribe.

Much has been made of the influence of metalwork on the decoration of *Durrow*, and even earlier on Durham A.II.10. In the previous chapter, we noticed Ryan's comment on the correspondence between the decoration of religious objects and personal or secular ornaments: a correspondence which Ryan finds 'remarkable'. George Henderson has also commented on the fact (1987, 37) that 'secular decoration *intruded* [this author's italics] into church use'.

To these comments, a possible reply would be that there was no necessary difference between the repertory of religious and that of secular art, just as the examples of Eligius, bishop and metalworker, and Billfrith, anchorite and worker in gold, silver and gems, demonstrate that there were no distinctions between those engaged in secular metalworking and those in the religious field. But this is not an adequate answer when we consider painting on vellum, where the actual materials and relevant techniques are so different from those of the metalworker. Here we may invoke a deliberate assimilation on the part of the painter. A probable motive was to put the service of God, and the instruments of that service, on the same aristocratic, and even heroic, level as that of the service of the king. We should further recall that many religious leaders came from aristocratic and even royal backgrounds: Columba, Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop come immediately to mind.

### 20.3.2 The Lindisfarne Gospels

Compared with Durrow, the Lindisfarne Gospels constitute an altogether more majestic volume. Although it has only ten more folios, the page size of 340 x 240 mm1 (3.5 x 9.5in) offers more than twice the space for decoration. To make a coarse comparison: whereas the zoomorphic-interlace page in Durrow (folio 192v) has only 42 animals, folios 26v and 210v in Lindisfarne display 132 and 108 respectively. On the other hand, folio 94v has only 16 animals, but these are outweighed by a wealth of pure interlace, and step, fret and Celtic scroll patterns.

The decorative programme of Lindisfarne is broadly similar to that of Durrow: each gospel is preceded by two decorated folios, and begins with enlarged and highly orna-

mented letters for the opening word. Two minor differences are that Lindisfarne omits the group of four evangelist symbols of Durrow folio 2; and has two folios of decorated text at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, one for the opening of the gospel (folio 27), and the second for the Incarnation-statement on folio 29 (Matt. 1:18; col illus II.8). The major difference, however, is that the four evangelist symbols are replaced by life-like portraits, with greatly reduced symbols above their heads on folios 25v, 93v, 137v (col illus II.6) and 209v (illus 140).

### Evangelist symbols

In comparing Lindisfarne with Durrow and Kells, we can usefully begin with the Evangelist symbols, man, animals and bird: these appear more lively, and more realistic, than those in the other Gospels. In Durrow, the man and the eagle are especially stiff and stylized, largely as a result of their metalwork models. Those in Kells are purely decorative, as is emphasized by their rich and variegated colours. In Lindisfarne, the metalwork models have been cast aside, and the creatures certainly have realistic colours. This is not to suggest that there is anything like photographic realism, though the eagle, and also the birds on the carpet-pages, have been discussed—fruitlessly—in ornithological terms.

140  
Lindisfarne, fol  
209v: portrait of St  
John (*British  
Library*).



The evangelist portraits also achieve a degree of human realism. All except John are seen from a three-quarter viewpoint, seated in a relaxed posture, engrossed in writing their gospels (eg Luke, col illus II.6). John alone is seen frontally, apparently reading (perhaps aloud) from a scroll of his gospel (illus 140). An attempt is made to depict credible seats, footstools, and even a writing stand for Luke; but in the absence of any knowledge of perspective, the results are not very realistic. The Matthew portrait closely resembles a portrait of Esra in another northern English Gospel book, the Codex Amiatinus, and it is likely that both derive from a common Mediterranean model.

Finally, each evangelist and evangelist symbol has a nimbus, gold, yellow, or reddish-orange, with an outer band normally of a different colour. The saints themselves are named in Greek (but written in Latin capitals). The symbols are designated in lower case as *imago hominis*, *leonis*, *vituli*, *aequilae*, and each one carries a book representing the gospel.

The symbols are placed immediately above the heads of the evangelists, so that the nimbus of the saints cover part of the body of the symbol. This position recalls the portrait of St Luke in the 6th-century *St Augustine Gospels*, folio 129v (col illus II.1; Wilson 1984, pl 15), where a winged ox, holding a gospel-book between its hooves, appears in an arch above the enthroned saint. This ultimately Mediterranean pattern appears again in the *Lichfield Gospels* (Nordenfalk 1977, pl 24: Mark and lion; pl 25: Luke and calf/ox). It is absent, however, from the *Book of Kells*, in which the only two portraits, Matthew and John, are not accompanied by symbols.

### Decorative schemes

Whatever Mediterranean influences we may detect on the pages with evangelist portraits and symbols, there can be no doubt that the carpet-pages and decorated initials are wholly Insular, and indeed represent the full flowering of Insular painting. The five carpet-pages display an outstanding inventiveness and versatility of form and subordinate decoration, combined with a highly disciplined sense of balance (illus 141 and col illus II.7).

Each has a rectangular frame, with a decorative extension at each corner, and normally a pair of dogs' heads as guardians at the centre of each side or at the corners. On carpet-page 26v, however, they take the form of curved trumpet-scrolls which suggest guardian eagles, recalling those on the Capheaton hanging-bowl. The frame consists of two narrow bands, which are actually the elongated bodies of the border- or corner-animals; and within this is normally a wider band with interlaced animals or abstract step- or fret-patterns.

Within the frame, the central feature is a cross, which may have a two-unit stem (folios 2v (col illus II.7) and 26v); or may be reduced to a very small equal-armed cross with detached T-shaped extensions (folio 210v); or may lose all obvious resemblance to a cross, as on folio 94v, where the central element is a large circle with four short radial extensions which merge into an inner frame. This may belong to a class of 'disguised' symbols and words; but a clear cross-statement is also conveyed by five step-pattern crosses within the circle. Folio 26v has five small crosses and an eight-petalled marigold in the six units of the cross,

141  
Lindisfarne, fol  
138v: carpet page  
(British Library).



and Stevenson has argued that the pelta-like arrangement of the animal bodies within these units creates larger crosses (Stevenson 1982, espec fig 7.3). Folio 210v has four small swastikas in the field.

In each case, both the body of the main cross and the background is in each case filled with rich and intricate ornament. Within the overall variety, four leading types can be distinguished, all with links to metalwork, both Mediterranean or 'Classical', and Insular or Celtic/Germanic: i) Celtic scrolls and peltas, ii) pure interlace, iii) zoomorphic interlace and iv) step, key, fret and related patterns.

Celtic designs are absent from folio 2v (col illus II.7), and also from 26v, except for the possibly ornithomorphic character of the trumpet scroll. But folios 94v and 210v have rather small panels of trumpets, spirals and peltas. Moreover, at the very heart of the major cross on folio 138v is a square panel, itself divided into quarters which each contain a roundel with ornithomorphic scrolls (illus 141). From these sprout attenuated trumpets, which link up with peltas to create a slender, almost disguised, cross at the centre of the whole page. All this, in rich golden-yellow, green, red and black, matches the finest enamelled escutcheons on the hanging-bowls.

The zoomorphic interlace typically occupies panels which contain one or two pairs of interlaced dogs or birds, though it may also be used for a border around the whole frame (folio 2v), and on folio 26v the entire frame is filled with writhing attenuated bodies of dogs and birds with bodies coloured blue, red, pink, and green. The dazzling effect is enhanced because here, as elsewhere in Lindisfarne, the feathers of the birds are presented as scale-like patterns in these colours, reminiscent of the Durrow eagle, and ultimately, of course, of cloisonné work with garnet or enamel inlays. But when we compare Lindisfarne 26v with the Sutton Hoo shoulder-clasps and purse-lid (or even the interlaced animals of Durrow folio 192v), we appreciate the liberating effect for the artist of the step from gold, garnet and enamel to vellum, pen, paint.

The non-zoomorphic interlace in Lindisfarne is characteristically made up of two (occasionally three or four) very fine strands, normally a golden-yellow in colour, which recalls fine gold wire. Occasionally the strands are blue or reddish-brown. Very frequently, the lines run diagonally across a circle, thus suggesting a saltire-cross, or a cross with expanded terminals in reserve. These belong in the category of hidden or disguised crosses (Stevenson 1982).

Finally, we turn to the geometric, or more strictly rectilinear patterns, the very opposite of zoomorphism, of interlace, and of Celtic fluidity. Rectilinear forms dominate the cross on the first carpet-page. At the centre of each of the six main squares of the cross is a small pale yellow square within a green border, reminiscent of a stone or glass inlay. The body of the cross is filled with a square grid, set at 45°, imitating cloisonné work. The conjunction of the alignment of this grid with the vertical/horizontal lines of the cross creates six rather stubby saltire-crosses around the small square inlays. Between the cross and the sides of the frame are two square and two oblong panels, filled with cloisonné-based patterns of stepped crosses and half crosses. In addition to the main cross, therefore (and omitting the 'disguised' crosses in the interlace), this opening carpet-page has four stepped crosses and six saltire crosses. This is a very powerful celebration of the Holy Cross.

Compared with this, the key infilling around the cross on folio 138v, and the fret pattern

at the corners of the frame on folio 210v appear as wholly decorative, if such a concept can be entertained in a Gospel book. Folio 26v has no geometric decoration, but 94v picks up the theme of the cross. Within the central circle of the main cross are five stepped crosses. Moreover, the colour contrasts here make it possible to see a stubby saltire (Stevenson 1982, fig 7.1). In the borders at the sides of this page there are also four panels with a total of 24 small cloisonné saltires; and at top and bottom are two panels of rather poor fret pattern. These geometric patterns are not part of either Celtic or Germanic traditions, though there are traces of them in Roman Britain, and they were certainly taken up by the carvers of Insular crosses. Equally certainly they had an important role in the Lindisfarne carpet-pages, though they were little used to embellish the initial letters of the individual gospels.

Compared with Durrow, the initial letters in Lindisfarne are larger: the opening letter normally occupies the whole height of the page (illus 142; col illus II.8). Moreover, the following letters, while observing the principle of *diminuendo*, spread more widely. The whole layout is more elaborate, and makes use of a wider range of motifs. These include a vigorous assemblage of Celtic scrolls, trumpets, peltas and triquetras. There is both pure and zoomorphic interlace, with both dogs and birds. A double row of contour-dotting is normal for the chief letters, though background dotting of blocks of letters is rare. An interesting innovation is the use of dots to create interlace patterns, and in one case to sketch two entwined animals (folio 95, illus 142). This technique immediately recalls the pointillé animals of the Monymusk reliquary. Panels of step and fret patterns are, however, sparingly used.

Miniature crosses, such as were used in the Cathach and the Book of Durrow do not occur in Lindisfarne. On the other hand, four folios have what appear to be hidden or disguised crosses. The opening of the Gospel according to Matthew (folio 27), begins with the word *LIBer*, The Book [of the genealogy of Christ]. Crosses are formed by the intersection of the bottom stroke of the L with the I and the B, and are emphasized by the colour scheme: moreover, the L and I intersection contains an unusual interlace of four birds. In the same way, on folio 29, a cross is formed by the intersection of the R and I of *XRI*, and is picked out with a blue ribbon-interlace (col illus II.8). At the start of Mark (folio 95), the

142  
Lindisfarne, fol 95:  
opening of St  
Mark's Gospel  
(British Library).



cross bar of the N of INItium (the Beginning), is turned through two right-angles to create a cross which again is picked out with coloured interlace. Finally, in Luke the O of QUOniam (Whereas), contains two stepped crosses in cloisonné technique (folio 139). In three out of four cases, the centre of the cross is red, the colour of blood, of martyrs, and perhaps here of the Crucifixion.

### 20.3.3 The Book of Kells

The Book of Kells is a large volume. Today there are 340 folios, but it is known that some have been lost since 1621. Taking account of material missing from the gospel text, it can be inferred that there were originally about 370 folios. The actual page size has also suffered from bad clipping by a former binder, as can be seen from the loss of ornament and even parts of human heads, for instance on folios 291v and 292. An original page size of about 370 x 260mm (14.5 x 10.25in) is suggested.

Kells shows broadly the same pattern as Durrow and Lindisfarne, and the same programme of illustrations. Indeed, in some respects it marks a typological development from the earlier books. More important is the increase in the number of full-page decorations, and the exuberant way in which the painted embellishments appear not only on the major decorated folios, but on the initial letters of the verses of the Gospel text itself.

#### Decorative pages

Including the Virgin-and-Child on folio 7v (col illus II.9) (but excluding the canon tables and other preliminary matter) there are 20 full pages of decoration, though some of these may also carry several words of text. The decorated pages, however, are not found evenly distributed throughout the book. While there are nine in Matthew's gospel, there are only four in Luke, and indeed only three in each of Mark and John. This evidence presumes the loss of some illustrated folios.

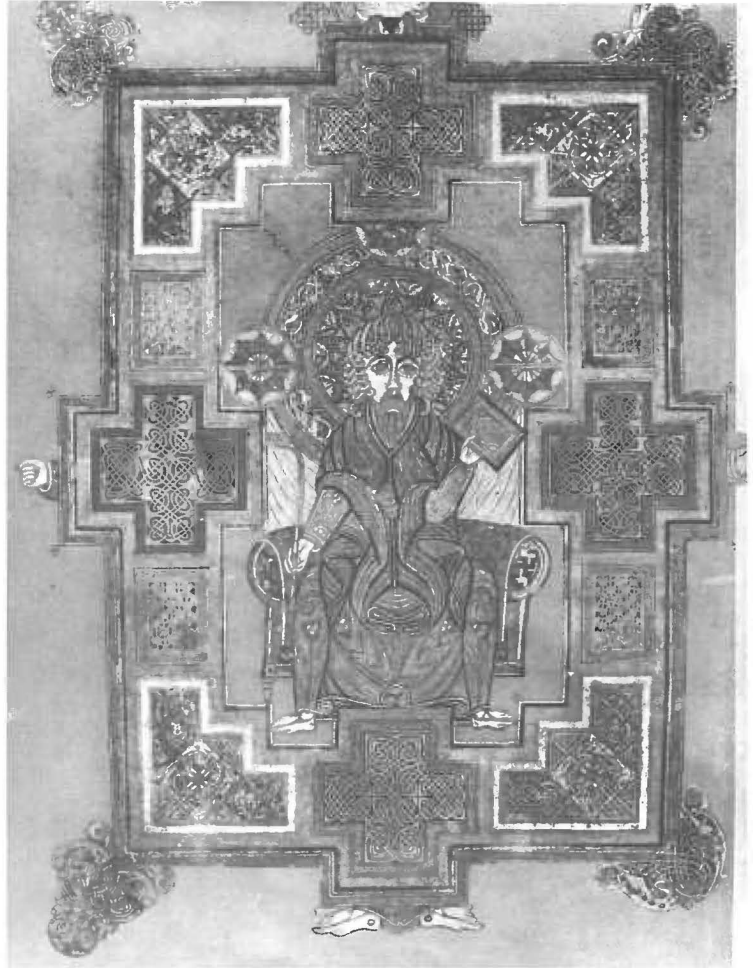
Compared with the four separate pages of evangelist-symbols in Durrow (plus one group of all four), and the four portraits-plus-symbols in Lindisfarne, Kells has three pages each with a set of four symbols, respectively at the beginning of Matthew, Mark and John (folios 27v, 129v and 290v: col illus II.10). But it also has a page (folio 187v) with the Man and Lion symbols interspersed with the account of Christ's ascension, and set within a saltire cross (Mark 16.19). We shall shortly see other examples of this embellishment of key passages of text for the sake of emphasis. Two further points should be made about the symbols. In Durrow they are naively stiff; in Lindisfarne they make a gesture towards realism; but in Kells they make no such concession, and are uninhibitedly decorative. Consistently with this, bodies and wings dazzle the reader with a range of brilliant colours.

So far as portraits are concerned, these are known only for two of the evangelists, namely Matthew and John (folios 28v and 291v). Matthew stands in an ornamental arch, flanked by a highly stylized calf or ox and an eagle. He holds a book in his right hand. The frame of the portrait bears principally zoomorphic interlace, though there are also circular and semi-circular panels of Celtic scrolls. John by contrast is seated on a chair (illus 143). He holds his gospel in his left hand, a combined pen and scraper-eraser in his right, and there is a tiny ink-horn by his right foot. The most important feature of the frame is the placing of four large crosses of pure interlace above, below and at each side.

Two new portraits appear in Kells: the Virgin and Child (col illus II.9), and a full-length Christ (folio 32v; col illus II.11). Mary sits, facing half-left, on an elaborate throne, with the Child on her knees looking right. They are accompanied by four angels, within a frame of animal interlace. Mary has an elaborate nimbus on which the inner band contains three small equal-armed crosses, a feature known as a cruciform nimbus. In Kells, Christ himself, whether as child or adult, does not always have a nimbus. On folio 32v, he stands under an arch like that of the Matthew portrait four pages earlier, except that the arch is inhabited by two resplendent peacocks, themselves symbols of the Resurrection (Metford 1983, 194), standing on vases (or chalices?) which sprout leaves and grapes symbolizing Christ as the true vine. He holds a book in both hands, and is flanked by four angels.

Mary and the adult Christ appear wholly stylized, partly because of their frontal presentation, their staring eyes, and their 'Celtic-scroll' hair. By contrast, the Child is surprisingly life-like, though his shock of red curls, and his size as compared with his Mother, argue that he has left infancy many years behind. He gazes up to Mary with a look of adoration, and stretches up his left hand to her breast in what Kitzinger has described as 'playful gestures of affectionate babyhood'. He adds 'the details...express a more intimate, a more humanized relationship between Mother and Child than is commonly represented in works of that period' (Kitzinger 1956, 257-61).

Another important innovation in Kells is the juxtaposition of biblical text and narrative illustration. Thus folio 203r has an elaborately decorated opening to Luke, chapter 4:1: 'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit': the introduction to Christ's Temptation by the Devil. In verse 9, the last of the temptations, 'the devil led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the highest point of the Temple'. This is illustrated on the facing page (folio 202v; illus 144) by a building not unlike a house-shaped reliquary, a form which had itself been modelled on a contemporary Insular church. The bust of Christ, distinguished here by a cruciform nimbus, appears above the roof-ridge, and looks towards a black, almost skeletal, devil on the viewer's right. Immediately above Christ's head are two angels, recalling the devil's claim that 'He [God] will command his angels to guard you' (Luke, 4:10). On the left side of the roof is a group of nine men, and there are a further



143  
Book of Kells, fol  
291v: portrait of  
St John (*Trinity  
College Library  
Dublin*).



144  
Book of Kells, fol  
202v: Christ's  
Temptation by the  
Devil (*Trinity  
College Library  
Dublin*).

Within the arch are the words of Matt.26:30: *Et ymno dicto, exierunt in montem Oliveti*, 'And having sung a hymn, they [that is, Christ and the disciples] went to the Mount of Olives'. Thus begins the account of the agony in the garden, and the subsequent arrest, trial and crucifixion of Christ.

Christ himself faces the viewer, with his forearms raised at 45°, and grasped (or supported) by two much smaller men who stand in profile. Traditionally this scene has been regarded as the arrest of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, though this event is not mentioned in the Gospel for a further 20 verses (Matthew, 26:50). An attempt has been made to demonstrate that the scene is not of the arrest, but is actually a symbol of the Crucifixion itself (O'Reilly 1993). This view is not followed here, essentially because the only near-contemporary painted crucifixion in an Insular context (Durham Gospels, Durham MS A.II.17: Nordenfalk 1977, pl 14) shows the cross itself quite clearly, Christ's arms are horizontal, and the iconography is completed by the spear-bearer and sponge-bearer. A second example of this same crucifixion-iconography can be seen in

25 in front of the temple, who probably represent 'all the kingdoms of the world' (Luke, 4:5). At the door of the Temple is the bust of a man with a simple nimbus, holding two flabella or liturgical fans. All this is framed within panels of both pure and zoomorphic interlace (including four stepped crosses). In the upper corners of the frame are two other angels, each carrying a book. The angel on the right has a chalice from which flows a spray of vines, symbolizing the Eucharist, and Christ himself as the True Vine; while that on the left has a jar from which flows not a vine, but apparently an olive branch, another powerful symbol in both the Old and the New Testament (discussion of iconography, Henry 1974, 189-90).

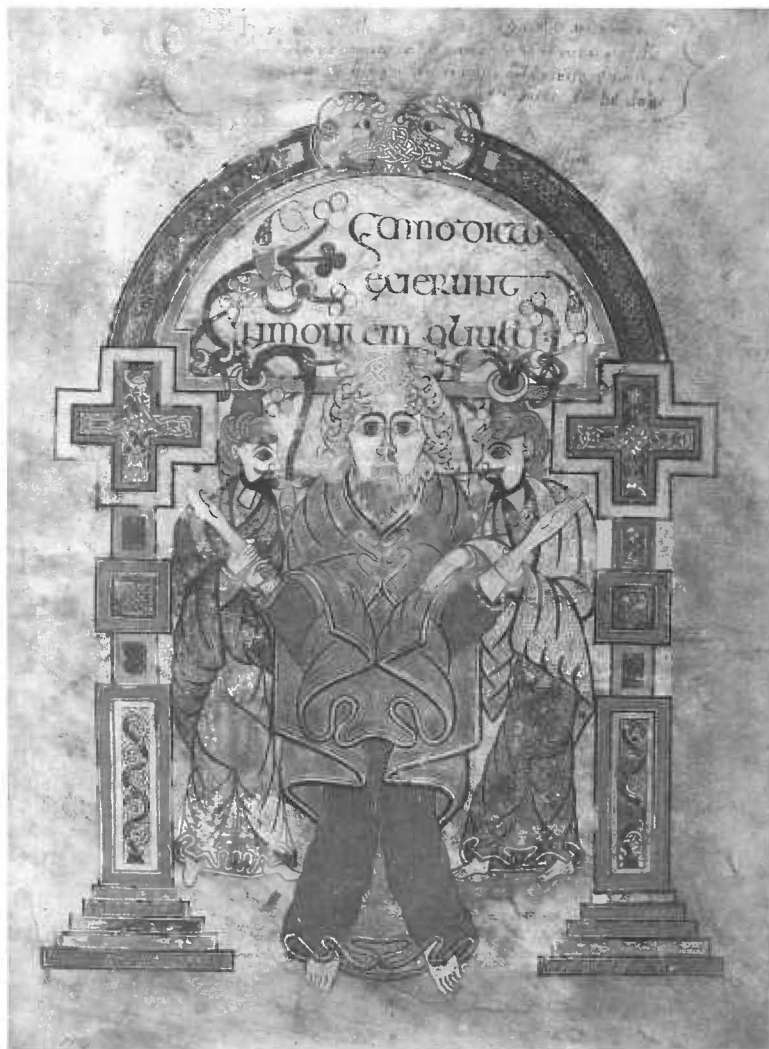
A second example of text-plus-illustration occurs on folio 114 (illus 145). Here Christ stands under an arch, of which the pillars are formed of panels of interlace, including two crosses for the imposts. The centre of the arch itself consists of two fierce confronted lions' heads.

a gilt-bronze plaque from Athlone (Ryan 1989a, 140-1).

Despite this rejection of one of O'Reilly's hypotheses, it must be stressed that her paper is a most penetrating and stimulating analysis, which is required reading for anyone who wishes to comprehend the thought-structures of early Christianity. Indeed, it stands on the intellectual level of Krautheimer's well-known analysis of the iconography of medieval architecture (Krautheimer 1971). Among other interesting comments is her discussion of the significance of the position of Christ's arms and legs. The arms are in the so-called *orans* position, which was the early Christian attitude of prayer and intercession, with a pictorial ancestry going back to 4th-century catacombs. At the same time, Christ's legs are splayed out below the knees: an impossible position for a crucified person, but suggesting that the splayed arms and legs may be read as the Greek letter X (*chi*), the first letter of *Xristos*, and itself therefore a significant letter.

Above the heads of the two attendants, whether supporters or arresting soldiers, are jars sprouting leaves and round fruits, but not grapes, unlike the chalice of the right-hand angel in the Temptation scene. These may be intended to depict olives, appropriate therefore to the Mount of Olives. Moreover, olives and oil are also symbolic of the anointment of Old Testament kings, and especially David (1 Samuel, 16:13), foreteller of Christ himself. The symbolism of oil in relation to Christ himself is well expounded by O'Reilly (1993, 111-2). These are hints only at the richness of the deeper meanings to be discovered in the Kells paintings.

The folio following Christ's arrest (folio 114v; illus 145) is taken up with the first seven words of Matthew, 26:31, in which Jesus warns the disciples that they are about to be offended (*scandalum patiemini*) because of him. This statement provides an excellent example of decorative emphasis on significant passages, at the expense of the legibility of the actual words. All the letters are display capitals, running continuously—that is, without breaks between words. The horizontal of the opening T expands into two circles containing zoomorphic interlace, while the vertical of the T curls in an almost complete



145  
Book of Kells, fol  
114: Arrest of  
Christ: for explana-  
tion, see text  
(Trinity College  
Library Dublin).



146  
Book of Kells, fol  
124: Matthew's  
account of the  
crucifixion (Matt,  
27:38) (Trinity  
College Library  
Dublin).

The Kells treatment of the initial letters of individual Gospels, a feature which we have already seen in Durrow and Lindisfarne, is consistent with the overall exuberance of Kells. The ornamentation is vastly richer and more complicated than in the other two Gospel-books. This generalization is best exemplified by the Incarnation-statement in Matthew, I:18, 'Christ's birth, however, was thus...' (folio 34; col illus II.12). We have already noticed the progressive development from the simple enlargement of *XRI AUTEM* on an otherwise normal text-page in Durrow, to a fully decorated page with only 12 words of text, the first two of which fill half the page, in Lindisfarne. Folio 34 of Kells, however, bears only *XRI*, followed by an abbreviation for *autem*, and *generatio*. The Chi extends to the full height of the page, whereas *generatio* is less than a fortieth of that height. The celebration of the name of Christ could not be more graphically expressed.

At first sight, the ornamentation might be described as normal for the Insular repertory. The curving arms of the *Chi* enfold and sprout trumpets and roundels; the roundels enclose smaller roundels, with triquetras and trumpets. Much of the animal and other interlace is set within circular frames. Among the decorative panels, there are several

circle ending in a trumpet scroll, and encloses the second letter, U. There then follow an N, C, and then the first two letters of DI[cit], with the I inside the D. To balance the large T, there is a ferocious lion's head; the body, embellished with panels of pure and zoomorphic interlace and fret patterns, then provides a square frame for the rest of the text. There is much use of sombre colours, especially yellow-gold, purple and black.

Another page which uses display capitals, a fantastically elaborated initial T, and a lion's head frame to emphasize a major event is folio 124r, part of Matthew's account of the crucifixion (Matt, 27:38; illus 146). The basic statement, *TUNC CRUCIFIXERANT*, 'Then they crucified', occupies two lines in the top half of the page. The lower half continues *XRI CUM EO DUOS LATRONES*, 'Christ [and] with him two robbers'. These words, however, are not laid out in horizontal lines, but make a saltire cross, itself a symbol of the Greek letter Chi. The frame is filled with interlace and fret designs, and the spaces between the lettering are infilled with dotted interlace and other patterns.

which hark back to Celtic millefiori, and pure interlace and fret patterns are not common. The overall impression is of a surprisingly slight Germanic component. But two elements distinguish the Kells scriptorium: the use of human or angelic heads and busts as letter-terminals and embellishments; and the colonisation of spaces by cats and even mice. The second of these will shortly receive fuller treatment.

The ultimate in obscurity is presented at the beginning of Mark's Gospel (folio 130; col illus II.13): *Initium evangelii IHU XRI*; '(The) beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ'. These four Latin words are divided into seven elements: INI/TI/UM/EVAN/GE/LIIHU/XRI. Of these, the last five are fairly readily discerned, but not so the first two. The text as a whole is buried in an exuberance of decoration which demonstrates the full repertory of the Kells scriptorium.

Given the importance of carpet-pages in Durrow and Lindisfarne, it is perhaps surprising that only one such is present in Kells; and despite the known loss of some pages it seems unlikely that three carpet-pages have been lost. Henry suggests (1974, espec 182), from the evidence of other Gospel Books later than Lindisfarne, that such decoration had fallen out of favour. Whatever the explanation, Kells folio 33 (col illus II.14) is a sumptuous glowing design of eight linked roundels, four on a central axis, and two on each side. This pattern is reminiscent of the double-cross which opens the Book of Durrow, though there the horizontal and vertical lines link squares, not roundels. Within the overall frame, the details—smaller roundels with Celtic scrolls, and writhing animals in circular and semi-circular patterns—are very close to those of the great XRI page which follows it. There can be no doubt that they are by the same artist.

### Text illustrations

So far we have considered only the major decorated pages in Kells—something less than one thirtieth of the whole book. But on every page of Kells, the opening letter of each verse is filled in, normally in three colours, whereas in Lindisfarne they would merely have been picked out with red contour dots. In addition, some of the Kells text-initials are further embellished, especially with writhing animals which sometimes form the actual letter. Moreover, spaces at the end of lines may be filled, sometimes with stylized flowers. Occasionally, the decoration consists of no more than pen-drawn crosses in red round the margins of the page. More often there are detached panels, for instance of fret or scroll patterns, richly coloured.

Greater interest attaches to the human and animal ornament, abundant in quality and astoundingly rich in invention. There are men (rarely women), animals, birds, even fish, entwined, intertwined, grappling and biting. There are several multiple linkings, especially as margin fillers: the largest of these groups involves no fewer than seven animals in a vertical chain (folio 250v). Sometimes the beasts themselves form capital letters: for instance, on folio 188v, a fish bites a cat, the two animals making a letter F. Characteristically the beasts and birds normally have surprised, agonized, or at the very least, disapproving expressions.

Men are shown riding horses, drinking from chalices (an unusual religious motif), grappling with one another, and especially pulling beards. There is even an ithyphallic warrior with spear and targe as a filler in the bottom corner of folio 200. Among animals, ferocious lions are common, dogs (or wolves), mice and hares are rare. Among birds, peacocks are probably the commonest, but there is a farmyard group of a rooster and two hens. The colouring of all these creatures makes no attempt at realism: a dog, for

instance, has two blue and two green legs. The cats may be blue, green, yellow, or have yellow ears and tail, or a spotted body: one is brilliantly striped in red and green.

The cats deserve further discussion, not merely because they are the commonest animal. Bieler has drawn attention to the relationship between an Irish monk in the monastery of Reichenau and his white cat Pangur (Bieler 1963, 44). According to a delightfully intimate poem in Old Irish (translation, Meyer 1911, 81), cat and monk each has his special art: while the cat pursues mice, the monk pursues knowledge, and each rejoices in his successes.

The theme of cat and mouse is the subject of a little vignette towards the bottom of folio 34 (col illus II.12). Here two mice are disputing possession of a round, biscuit-like object: behind each mouse stands a cat, and on the back of each cat stands another mouse. This seems a playful, even frivolous, scene for a Gospel Book. It does acquire some religious relevance in that the round biscuit is marked with a cross, and is clearly a wafer for the Eucharist. But that relevance seems insignificant when we recall that folio 34 is the most numinous page in Kells, perhaps even in the whole repertory of Insular Gospel-book painting: the great XRI statement of Christ's Incarnation in the first chapter of Matthew (Matt, 1:18). To a modern mind, these two elements, frivolous and numinous, may seem impossible to reconcile, and may indeed leave the feeling that the deeper recesses of the Insular religious mind are beyond our understanding.



At this point it is possible to sum up, albeit very briefly, the contrasting characters of the three great Insular Gospel books. Durrow was pioneering and experimental. Its motifs were therefore closely tied to those of metalwork, and the patterns tend to be highly disciplined, even stiff. But this gives a formal dignity to the whole work. In Lindisfarne, the painting achieves a mature and majestic formality. This is particularly noticeable in the evangelist portraits, which owe something to Mediterranean models. Moreover, it is the product of a new stylistic package, totally applicable to vellum, pen and brush. The Insular decoration, notwithstanding its rich complexity, tends to be repetitive and therefore predictable.

Finally, Kells is richly inventive and colourfully exuberant, to the extent of being ill-disciplined and unpredictable. Its motifs are deeply symbolic, indeed often obscurely so. Something of this sense of mystery was felt even by later medieval clerics. For it was surely of Kells, rather than any other Gospel Book, that Giraldus Cambrensis wrote in the late 12th century:

‘If you take the trouble to look very closely, and penetrate...to the secrets of the artistry, you will notice such intricacies, so delicate and subtle...so fresh still in their colourings that you will not hesitate to declare that all these things must have been...the work, not of men, but of angels’.

(translation, O'Meara 1982).

## 20.4 TWO FURTHER NORTHUMBRIAN BOOKS

This chapter has deliberately concentrated on details of the three great Gospel Books. There are, however, two other books from a Northumbrian scriptorium which require

some mention here, especially because neither is a Gospel Book or a psalter. They are the Durham *Cassiodorus*, and the *Codex Amiatinus*.

#### 20.4.1 The Durham *Cassiodorus*

The first of these, the Durham *Cassiodorus* (Durham Cathedral manuscript B.II.30), is an abbreviated version of an original commentary on the psalms by Cassiodorus, a 6th-century Italian aristocrat, and subsequently founder of a monastery. The Durham manuscript is the earliest known copy of this work. It consists of 270 large folios, 420 x 295 mm (16.5 x 11.5in); not surprisingly, it weighs 9.5kg (21 lb). An earlier attribution to the hand of Bede (*de manu Bedae*) is now rejected, partly because no fewer than six scribal hands can be detected in the writing, but also because some of the very slight decoration suggests a date around AD 750. The attribution to Jarrow is regarded as possible but not proven (Bailey 1978).

Our interest is with two colour pages, respectively before Psalms 51 and 101, which appropriately depict David, the supposed composer of the Psalms (it is presumed that there was another portrait before Psalm 1, but this has been lost). The first portrait (illus 116a above) is labelled 'David Rex', each word in a nimbus-like double circle, the other simply 'David' in a red ring. David Rex sits on a throne guarded by Insular dogs' heads, and plays a five-string lyre, whereas the other David (col illus II.16) holds a spear in his left hand, and tramples a two-headed scaly serpent underfoot. Both figures are framed in a broad band of panels of Insular interlace, the one being partly of pure and partly of zoomorphic interlace; the other being chiefly of pure interlace, but with stepped crosses at the corners. Apart from the overt stepped crosses, 'hidden' crosses abound in the pure interlace. (For illustrations, Nordenfalk 1977, pls 27 & 28; better colour in Wilson 1984, pl 31).

The significance of David-images in a Christian context is that he was regarded as a forerunner of the Jewish Messiah, and therefore of Christ. Bailey has drawn attention to the clear indications of Christ-like attributes in the two David figures (Bailey 1978, 10-11). David Rex has a cruciform nimbus (ie one in which the outer ring has three arms of a cross), an attribute which, from the late 5th century, distinguished Christ from saints and prophets. Moreover, two panels of the frame feature realistic prancing lions, recalling that Christ was hailed as Lion of the house of Judah (Revelation, 5:5). In the portrait of David the spear-carrying warrior, he holds a red ring in his right hand, strongly suggesting a wreath of victory over sin and death. Moreover, his trampling on a two-headed beast is an attribute typical of Christ.

#### 20.4.2 The *Codex Amiatinus*

Our second example, the *Codex Amiatinus* is not a Gospel Book but a 'pandect', or complete Bible. Physically, therefore, it is an exceptionally large book: 1030 folios or 2060 pages, with a page size of 505 x 340mm (27.5 x 20.5in). Without its original covers and travelling case it would have weighed about 34kg (75.5lb). It was one of three such pandects commissioned by Ceolfrith and executed in the Monkwearmouth-Jarrow scriptorium. It was being taken by the abbot to Rome as a present for the Pope when he died on the journey in 716. Unlike the other books which we have been considering, it therefore has a precise terminal date (Bruce-Mitford 1967).

The text is copied from books brought to Northumbria from Italy—including perhaps,

some from the monastery of Cassiodorus himself—by Ceolfrith and his precursor Benedict Bishop. The illustrations are based on models in 6th-century Mediterranean styles, and use a palette quite distinct from the normal Insular one, including the extensive use of gold and silver.

Much attention has been given to the portrait of Ezra, Old Testament prophet and scribe, on folio 5. He sits in front of an open cupboard of books, writing another book on his knee, and with the tools of the scribe at his feet (good colour illustration in Weitzmann, 1977, pl 48). The details of the scene are those of the 6th-7th centuries AD. For instance, the scrolls which would have been appropriate for Ezra have been replaced by books. Although the style has been considered inferior to that of its Mediterranean models, the concept of a realistic portrait was of great significance for the evangelist portraits in the Lindisfarne Gospels. Indeed, the pose of the Lindisfarne Matthew (folio 25v) is clearly based on Ezra (for the two portraits side-by-side, Wilson 1984, pls 38 & 39).

More striking in the contrast between Insular and Mediterranean themes and styles—even when the latter are imitated in an Insular scriptorium—is the Amiatinus page which opens the New Testament (folio 796v: col illus II.16). This depicts Christ enthroned against a starry background, accompanied by two angels. Christ has a cruciform nimbus, and with his right hand he points to a book in his left hand, perhaps symbolizing his role as teacher, or as giver of the New Law. The heavenly scene is enclosed within a circular, multicoloured frame. In the corners between this and the overall rectangular frame stand the four evangelists with their winged symbols.

The details of the Amiatinus Enthroned Christ have been compared unfavourably with the best Mediterranean painting (Nordhagen 1977). But in terms of realism they are far superior to portraits in the style of Kells and other Insular Gospel Books. We may speculate on whether this superiority was a Northumbrian trait, given the quality of the Lindisfarne portraits; or whether the near-Mediterranean style of Amiatinus was because it was intended as a present to the Pope.

### The use of mediterranean models

Given the presence, firstly of Mediterranean icons and books in Northumbria, as related in Bede's *Lives of the Blessed Abbots*, and secondly of close imitations like those in Amiatinus, it is surprising that copying of Mediterranean models was not more common. Obviously this would not be expected in relation to decorative motifs, where a vigorous style, incorporating Celtic, Germanic, and even Mediterranean interlace elements had developed in aristocratic metalwork before the first Insular Gospel Books were written. But portraiture was a different matter, because there were no local models. Initially, such models could only be found in the Mediterranean, but at least in Northumbria these were plentiful from the 670s, and their Insular fruits are evident in Amiatinus and Lindisfarne. Why were such imitations so rare elsewhere? Was there a lack of Mediterranean books and icons outside the monasteries of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow?

This conclusion is perhaps too simple. The Mediterranean influences on the depiction of the Virgin and Child on Kells folio 7v, and also on St Cuthbert's coffin, have been much discussed (Nordhagen 1977, 15-8; Cronin & Horie 1985 with reff). Attention may also be drawn to Kells folio 32v (col illus II.11) with its Enthroned Christ. He sits

with his right knee slightly raised, with his left hand concealed in his cloak but supporting a book, and his right hand pointing to the book. These, and other details, closely resemble the Enthroned Christ of the Codex Amiatinus (col illus II.16). The settings in the two cases are quite different, and Kells has its own powerful symbolism of peacocks, chalices, vines and olives: but it is difficult to believe that there is not a common model. A wider search among Mediterranean paintings may yet reveal other examples.

## 20.5 MATERIALS, IMPLEMENTS & TECHNIQUES

### 20.5.1 Vellum

The most important material for the making of books was, of course, vellum: the prepared skins of newly born or even uterine calves. In the case of Kells, however, rather thicker skins from two- or three-month-old calves were preferred for the major painted pages. Preparation involved the removal of hair and subcutaneous matter with a knife, after the skin had been soaked in a solution of lime or animal acids. Normally the skin was then cut to give four pages (that is, two leaves, a *bifolium*) with the line of the calf's spine running horizontally at the mid-point of the page (Meehan 1994, 85-6).

Because each calf yielded a single pair of leaves, it is often possible to estimate how many had been killed to make any particular book: in the case of Lindisfarne and the Durham Cassiodorus, about 130, and at Kells around 185. In the case of a pandect or complete bible such as the Codex Amiatinus, however, the figure rises to over 500 calves (Bruce-Mitford 1967, 2). The economic implications are self-evident.

### 20.5.2 Inks, colours, pens and brushes

For the main text of books, a dark brown ink was needed. This was made from crushed oak-apples and sulphate of iron in a base of gum and water. Both Lindisfarne and Kells also use a black ink, using carbon from soot or lamp-black (Meehan 1994, 86-8). There is a notable contrast between Insular colouring and that of the Early Christian Mediterranean and Carolingian Gaul, in that the last two used gold and silver very lavishly. In Insular contexts, however, they appear to have been used very sparingly, with the exception of the Codex Amiatinus (Bruce-Mitford 1967, 11 ff). This is further evidence for the special character of the Monkwearmouth-Jarrow scriptorium.

The Insular artists used a wide palette of bold colours, derived from both organic and inorganic sources. Among the former were blues from oriental indigo and north European woad; mauves and purples from a Mediterranean plant, and red from a Mediterranean insect. Red and white lead were used, a bright yellow was obtained from arsenic sulphide (orpiment), and green from copper. This last was unstable when damp, and has perforated the vellum in places. The most remarkable supposed import was the vivid blue lapis lazuli, coming ultimately from Afghanistan; but this may be queried, because it is apparently unknown in both English and Continental jewellery (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 603, n 1). The normal binding agent was egg-white, or occasionally fish glue (Backhouse 1981, 28; Meehan 1994, 88).

As we noted in describing Amiatinus, Lindisfarne and Kells, we have several depictions of the scribe at work. In the Lindisfarne gospels, Matthew and Mark write in a book with a quill pen, while Luke writes on a scroll held on his knee. In Kells John has an excep-

tionally large quill pen, and there is an ink-horn by his foot. The most elaborate suite of tools is that in the Amiatinus portrait of Ezra (good illustration in Weitzmann 1977, pl 48). In addition to his quill pen, scattered at his feet are a stylus, a template for drawing curves, a pair of compasses, and an ink bottle. Above these is a paint brush, and a possible T-square for ruling lines and right-angles (though this may be a cross-brace for a small table in front of Ezra which has been misunderstood by the painter). The most novel item in this list is the template, formerly interpreted as an ink-horn. Bailey, however, has made a convincing case for it as a template (Bailey 1978, 14-7).

### 20.5.3 Preparation and lay-out

It cannot be said that these contemporary depictions are very enlightening. For a deeper insight into working methods we must examine the clues provided by the manuscripts themselves. For a start, visual inspection suggests that even fairly simple interlace patterns, such as those on the opening carpet-page of Durrow, would have required preliminary setting out in order to maintain the regular spacing of the individual units. Today, with the aid of dividers, compasses and tracing film, it can be shown that the central roundel on the animal carpet-page (Durrow 192v) is a true circle; and the inter-linked roundels and scrolls of Durrow 3v were likewise based on compass-drawn circles. The regularity within the three groups of animal motifs on Durrow 192v argues for the use of a prepared pattern or template. Turning to Lindisfarne, the major elements of the cross on carpet-page 26v are a compass-drawn circle and five semi-circles of the same radius.

The text pages themselves had to be marked to ensure the regularity of the writing. This was done by setting up a framework of minute dots which were pricked through a gathering of several pages with a stylus. These were then joined horizontally and vertically by ruling each page using a hard, dry point. These can still be seen by close examination of the vellum.

Similar, but necessarily more complicated, methods were used for laying out the framework for interlace, scroll-work, and other geometric patterns on carpet-pages and decorative borders. In the case of Lindisfarne, Bruce-Mitford, by using the prickings and rulings on the unpainted backs of the carpet-pages, has shown how a sequence can be deduced for dividing a page and then setting out curvilinear designs. On a smaller scale, Bailey has demonstrated the use of a dry-point grid and pin-holes in order to construct a pattern of fine interlace in the decorative borders of the David portraits in the Durham Cassiodorus. Finally, Backhouse has very reasonably suggested that preliminary sketches may have been made on wax tablets, though no actual examples of these have been found (Backhouse 1981, 28-31; Bailey 1978, 12-3; Bruce-Mitford 1960, 221-31).

### 20.5.4 The finished product

The end result of these materials, tools and craftsmanship was, of course, a book like those which we see in the cupboard behind Ezra. Such a book was not merely so many gatherings of vellum, covered in writing and painting. Aldred, the Anglo-Saxon glossator of the Latin text of Lindisfarne, and writer of the colophon which named the scribe and other craftsmen, reported that it had been covered and impressed on the outside, and further adorned with gems, gold and gilded silver.

The original cover of Lindisfarne has been lost, and this is true also of Durrow and Kells. We do, however, have the original cover, probably of late 7th-century date, of a copy of John's gospel, which has been preserved because it was placed in Cuthbert's coffin. This, the Cuthbert or Stonyhurst Gospels, was bound within beechwood boards, covered with crimson goatskin. This is decorated in relief with a central square panel surrounded by simple linear interlace, and rectangular panels with an interlace of 'hidden' saltire crosses. In the central panel, vegetation stylized into the form of two S-scrolls, perhaps symbolizing vines, springs from a vase-like object, probably a chalice (Backhouse 1981, 14-5; Battiscombe 1956a; Wilson 1984, illus 20; interpretation here by LA).

A rare example of a Northumbrian bookbinding of the late 7th or early 8th century has been recognized at Fulda (Victor Codex MS Bonifatianus 1). The boards have decorated leather covers, held in place by silver rim-mounts: those at the corners take the form of inward-facing heads of guardian eagles (Wilson 1961).

Aldred's mention of ornaments on the outside of Lindisfarne, including gold, gems and silver-gilt, suggests that this book was enshrined in a jewelled cover of precious metal. This, like the original binding, has been lost. Indeed, although book covers of later date are known in Insular contexts, we have no complete examples of the late 7th and 8th centuries. It has been suggested that a gilt-bronze crucifixion plaque from Co Westmeath may have been pinned to the wooden cover of a gospel book (Ryan 1989, 140-1). An openwork mount of gilt bronze from Dublin has also been interpreted as one corner of a book shrine. In neither of these cases, however, can there be any certainty about their function, and it is suggested that the Dublin mount could as likely be from a portable altar (Ryan 1989a, 150; col pl 145).

## 20.6 PURPOSE AND SYMBOLISM

Although it is customary to treat gospel books as art objects—and that, indeed, has largely been the treatment followed in the preceding sections of this chapter—their prime purpose was, of course, to preserve the Word of God, revealed and enshrined in Holy Scripture. Second only to this was the promulgation of the Word. The most striking reminder of that role is provided by Aldred, who glossed the original Latin of the Lindisfarne Gospels in English 'with the help of God and St Cuthbert', thus making the Divine Word accessible in the vernacular.

Henry has made the point that the Book of Kells was compiled with extraordinary carelessness, 'even by the standards of the time'. In consequence, it could not have served as a work of reference in a monastic library, but 'was an altar-book made to be used for liturgical reading' (Henry 1974, 153). In the same vein, Backhouse (1981, 22) places the Lindisfarne Gospels with the altar vessels, presumably referring to chalice, paten, and strainer-ladle such as those in the Derry-naflan, Co Tipperary, hoard (Ryan 1989b, 130-2, col illus 124-7).

### 20.6.1 Scenic representation

What was the role of painting in promoting the Divine Word in an Insular context? We may consider this from three aspects: narrative or pictorial; the embellishment of phrases or even single words; and overall ornamentation. In the Mediterranean, early Christian

book-art had a strong narrative element, ultimately derived from the practice of illustrating secular poetry, drama, histories, and even scientific treatises (Weitzmann 1977, *passim*). In a Christian context, this led to the insertion of appropriate scenes from both the Old and the New Testaments, often in the form of continuous narratives, in which the story unfolded from left to right and then right to left down the page. In other cases, separate incidents were depicted in framed panels. Examples of this are known to have been brought to Britain by the Augustinian mission in AD 597, as we can still see in the Luke page of the Gospels of St Augustine (col illus II.1; Weitzmann 1977, pl 42).

To judge from the preserved body of Insular painting, however, such pictures—whether of individual scenes or fuller narratives—inspired little emulation in Britain and Ireland. In Kells we have noticed the scenes of the Temptation of Christ (folio 202v) and his arrest (folio 114). But otherwise there is nothing of a scenic or narrative nature in Durrow, Lindisfarne or Kells.

There is, however, a strong hint that we may have lost much relevant evidence. The Durham Gospel Fragment II, possibly written and painted at Lindisfarne, has a crucifixion scene (folio 38v; Nordenfalk 1977, pl 14). This includes the inscription ‘This is Jesus King of the Jews’ (Matt, 27:37), and also the incidents of the sponge-bearer (Matt, 27:48 and other Gospels), and the spear-bearer as related by John (19:34). Above the cross-arm are two angels. Apart from this scene, and the opening of John’s gospel, no other decorated pages remain.

In Britain and Ireland the pictorial pages may have been exhibited in churches in order to reinforce the message of the readings appointed from the Gospels as part of the liturgy. Gregory the Great considered that pictures provided a living reading of the Divine Word for those who could not read. That a text, rather than a scene, might be displayed in such a way is suggested by the image of Matthew at the beginning of his gospel in the Echternach or St Willibrord Gospels (Nordenfalk 1977, 48–50, pl 9). There an enthroned Matthew holds up his Gospel, open at the first four words: ‘Book of the begetting of Jesus Christ’. There is also evidence to suggest that gospel books were displayed in processions (Ó Carragáin 1994).

## 20.6.2 Embellishing the text

From these pictorial aspects, we may turn to the embellishment of lines of text, single words, and even single letters. Throughout the three Gospel-books which we have explored in detail there has been a clear tendency to increasing elaboration, which leads in Kells to distortion, and ultimately to the near illegibility of the letters. The climax is reached in Kells in the XRI of Matthew’s Gospel, which goes well beyond mere embellishment. The text itself concerns the Incarnation (Matt, 1:18); but the page is overwhelmed by the X, which is not merely the initial letter of the name of Christ, but may be taken as a symbol of the Crucifixion, so that we have here the whole span of the life of Jesus from conception to death (col illus II.12).

Once the significance of the Chi has been expounded, there is no obscurity about this page, but in other cases, especially in Kells, the elaborate distortion of the letters, or their arrangement, makes it difficult for the untutored eye to read the text. One extreme example of such distortion is seen in the QUO of Quoniam ‘Whereas...’, the opening of Luke’s Gospel on Kells folio 188. For a further case where a simple phrase has been rendered almost illegible, we may cite the layout, in a saltire-cross, of the account of the

two thieves crucified with Christ (Kells folio 124; illus 146). It is difficult to believe that this is ornament for ornament's sake. It is indeed most likely that the intention was to wrap up a religious mystery within a perceptual mystery, so that some of the most numinous passages or phrases of the text needed to be expounded by an initiate: that is to say, a learned priest (and note also col illus II.13 and discussion above).

Although Christianity is not normally regarded as one of the eastern mystery-religions of the Roman Empire, nonetheless it had strong mystery elements. These were variously interpreted and understood by early Christian commentators (Encyclopedia, s.v. mystery), but the Incarnation and the Crucifixion were primary. We have already seen the visual emphasis on the Incarnation-account in Matthew, 1:18. The Crucifixion provided two major icons, the standard Latin cross, and the saltire or X (chi) form. Elaborate variants of the Latin cross are a major feature of carpet-pages, beginning with folio 1v of Durrow (illus 138, and reaching its greatest elaboration (though still in the basic Durrow-form) in Kells folio 33 (col illus II.14).

But in addition to these immediately recognizable crosses, frequent mention has been made above of 'hidden' crosses. These may take the form of stepped crosses in geometric patterns, while in interlace, saltire crosses (which may also be interpreted as crosses with expanding arms) are common. As a legacy from the *Cathach*, miniature crosses may be inserted inconspicuously into decorated initial letters. A more subtle form can be created out of the intersections of individual letters: for instance, on the Lindisfarne XRI page (folio 29; col illus II.7), the intersection of the curve of the R with the I is picked out in a cruciform interlace and a different colour. Without expanding this list of examples, it can be asserted that the icon of the Crucifixion, in various forms and sizes, is ubiquitous in Gospel-books and other religious works such as the Durham *Cassiodorus*.

It is indeed not easy today to comprehend the hidden meanings, whether pagan or Christian, which underlie the decoration. A more fruitful line of analysis is to recall that the roots of the Insular flowering of book-decoration were firmly bedded in the colourful, sumptuous, even flamboyant metalwork patronized by a heroic warrior aristocracy, whether Celtic or Germanic in descent. What was fitting to promote respect, even awe, for the authority of a secular lord was wholly appropriate to promote feelings of awe and piety towards the King of Heaven. Moreover, the decoration turned a book into a rich offering to the Lord God.

From these roots sprang a decorative style which—with rare exceptions—owed little to the Mediterranean books which came with the Augustinian mission, or which were later brought to Northumbria by Benedict and Ceolfrith. The overwhelming inspiration of metalwork, turned to the purposes of the Insular-Christian church, is already clearly displayed in the Book of Durrow. It is further elaborated in the Lindisfarne Gospels, and acquires an astounding inventiveness in the Book of Kells, without ever losing its roots in aristocratic metalwork. Indeed, those roots were continually nourished in that intercourse between courts and monasteries, bishops and kings, which was a dominant feature of political, social and religious life.

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## CARVING IN STONE: THE BEGINNINGS

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### 21.1 PRELIMINARY

The works of art which were most widely available to an Insular audience were, without doubt, the crosses, stele and slabs bearing figures and other icons which normally had a religious significance, whether explicit or arcane. These can be considered at two levels of interpretation, which may be labelled respectively as iconography and iconology (brief historical summary: Cassidy 1992 (ed), 30-4). The first of these requires the correct identification of the action or scene which is depicted; the second explores deeply into the inner religious meaning of the icons.

It must be admitted that, even at the first level, a universally-accepted interpretation cannot always be reached. (For a particularly recondite discussion of the supposed image of John the Baptist at Ruthwell, see Farrell 1992, 36, n.4; and further references therein in the index under *Majestas*). Normally, however, the identification requires no more than a reasonable knowledge of the Old and New Testaments (preferably in the Vulgate), and of the Lives of the Desert Fathers. It appears, however, that even this may be outside the competence of some archaeologists and art historians, as witness the identification of David as 'rending the jaws', or even 'fighting the lion': these expressions have no scriptural authority in the account of David the shepherd boy in the Old Testament (I Samuel, 17). The correct account is of David rescuing his father's lamb(s) from any lion or bear which attempted to seize them: a matter of the deepest Christian significance, not least for the doctrine of the Resurrection (Alcock 1995b).

Interpreting the religious meaning which might be read into the icon—the study of iconology—is a far more difficult task. Ideally it would require at least a mastery of all the commentaries written up to the time that the icon under study was created: the writings, that is, of the early Christian Fathers, in particular St Augustine and St Gregory the Great; and in the case of Britain in the 8th century, Bede's many commentaries on the books of the Bible, which he himself listed (*HE* v, 24). The present study makes no claim to such mastery, nor even to a comprehensive knowledge of late 20th-century discussions of the ancient writers.

One particular obstacle to modern understanding must, however, be signalled here: namely, the multivalent significance of many icons. This is well brought out in Meyvaert's discussion of the archer at the head of the shaft of the Ruthwell cross. Meyvaert cites Gregory the Great as frequently pointing out that 'the images of Scripture can often be interpreted, on the allegorical level, either in a good or a bad sense'. Gregory himself says that a bow may signify the attacks of the wicked, the final day of judgement, or even the Scripture itself (Meyvaert 1992, 142). What is true of written images is equally true of pictorial ones, whether carved or painted. When, in Chapter 24, we turn to the religious aspects of architecture, we will find there a comparable multivalence, originally explored by Krautheimer in 1942 (reprinted 1971).

For the modern commentator, there should be a third level of interpretation—one which has been little considered in the past—which begins with the question: how did the ordinary, uninstructed and unregenerate person, whether thegn or peasant, interpret the Christian figural scenes? A case in point is provided by the lowest icon on the figural side of the Bewcastle cross (see *illus* 159). This shows a man supporting, on his left arm, an undoubted eagle. Since the eagle is the accepted symbol of St John the Evangelist, the figure is generally accepted as the Evangelist. But Bailey has perceptively remarked on the ‘surprisingly secular’ treatment of the figure (1989, 100). If that is how an experienced scholar sees the icon, it is reasonable to believe that a lay viewer of the 8th century might see here the King’s Falconer, a person of high social standing, and worthy to appear on a stately monument.

## 21.2 EARLY CARVING, OGAM AND INSCRIPTIONS

### 21.2.1 Early carving in Northumbria, Pictland and elsewhere

The received account of the origins and development of sculpture in northern Britain runs, with variations, along the following lines. Despite the fact that Oswald had raised a wooden cross before the battle of Heavenfield in AD 635, the earliest datable stone carvings in Northumbria are grave slabs and architectural carvings of the last quarter of the 7th century. The climax of Bernician sculpture was represented by the free-standing crosses at Bewcastle, Hexham and Ruthwell. These exhibit considerable Mediterranean influences, and their chronology is highly contentious, with dates ranging from the late 7th to the late 8th centuries. Thereafter, major stylistic changes resulted from Viking invasion and settlement.

Meanwhile, the Picts—for purposes of their own—were using a number of symbols (mostly abstract, but occasionally using animal forms), which were incised on rough slabs and boulders. In the second decade of the 8th century, as a result of Northumbrian contacts, the Picts began to erect slabs and stele bearing a cross in relief, together with relief versions of the symbols, and also lively scenes, both religious and apparently secular. These continued to the mid-9th century, when the symbols were gradually discontinued.

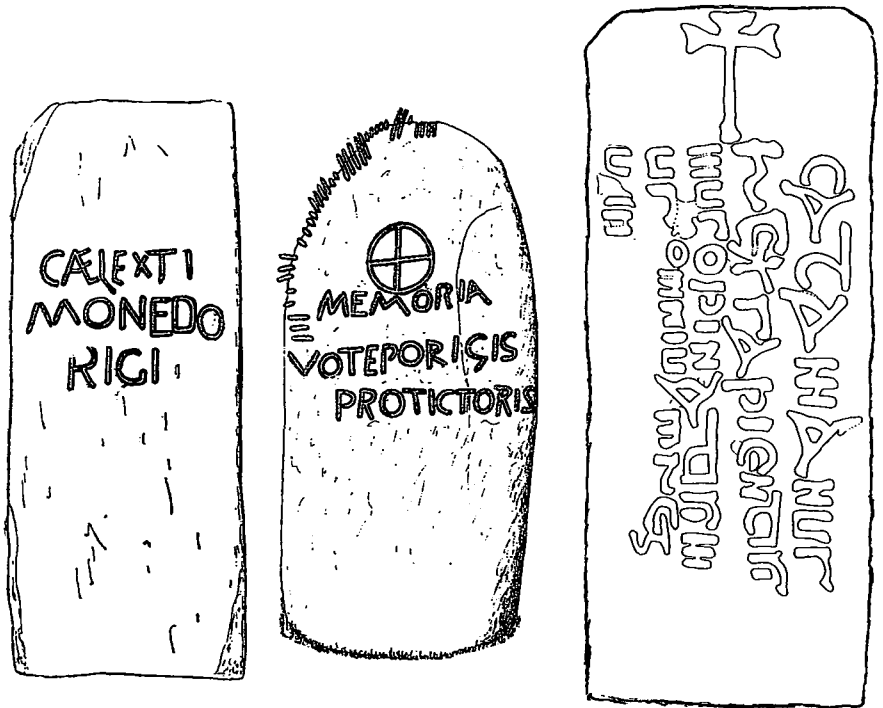
Contemporaneously with these developments in the south and east, the western Isles—and especially but not exclusively Iona—produced several major crosses which combined possible borrowings from Northumbria, Pictland and Ireland in highly individual monuments. It should indeed be mentioned that influences from Ireland, Mercia, Gaul and the Mediterranean, have been discerned in all areas.

Even if every allowance was made for the gross over-simplification of this account, it would still be unacceptable, not least because it ignores the British, pre-Anglian, contribution to Christian monuments in northern Britain, and the even earlier Irish creation of lapidary inscriptions in a vernacular language and script. An attempt will now be made to make good these omissions.

### 21.2.2 Early ogam stones

In an Insular and vernacular (that is, non-Roman) context, the practice of cutting inscriptions on stone with iron tools began in Ireland in the 5th century AD with the erection of stone pillars bearing ogam inscriptions (Macalister 1945; McManus 1991). These marked a double revolution: the invention of a new script; and the use of a permanent medium to record public statements, whether secular or religious.

147  
 Three royal Welsh  
 memorials: left,  
 Llanaber,  
 Merioneth; centre,  
 Castell Dwyran,  
 Carmarthen; right,  
 Llangadwaladr,  
 Anglesey (after  
*Nash-Williams*).



The ogham script was a fully organized alphabetic system of 20 characters: three groups of one to five strokes set either side of a stem-line or across it at an angle for the consonantal sounds, and one to five dots on the line for the vowel sounds. Though the alphabetic principle had been borrowed, not evolved, the ogham alphabet represented a new departure, invented within Ireland, with characters specifically devised for the Irish language. What is especially remarkable is that the characters appear fully evolved: there are no signs of preliminary fumbling (Mc Manus 1991).

The statements recorded in ogham were very restricted in content. The two commonest were: 1) X MAQQI Y and 2) X MAQQI MUCCOI Y, where X and Y are personal names in the genitive case. The translation is then: 1) [of] name X son of name Y; 2) [of] name X son of the descendants of Y, where Y is the eponymous (and possibly legendary or fabulous) founder of a family. These, then, are public statements about a three- or more generation family: namely, the anonymous memorialist, the son and the father, or founder of the family. Moreover, because the statements are in a permanent medium, they are addressed to future generations.

In a society in which the family was a major social unit, such a statement, laboriously carved in a permanent and public medium, was obviously of profound significance. It may indeed be conjectured that an inscribed stone marked the site of the burial of the first named person (though there is little firm evidence for this); and furthermore, that it asserted a title to the parcel of land on which the stone was erected.

In the 5th and 6th centuries AD, folk movements from southern Ireland established settlements in south-west Wales (and less strongly in north-west Wales). They introduced the Irish language, and with it the appropriate ogham script for making public statements.

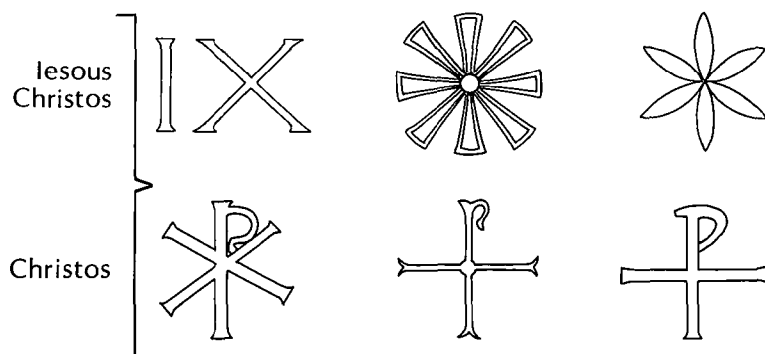
In this period, religious inscriptions in Latin were also being carved on stone by British communities in south-west England, Wales and south-west Scotland (Thomas 1994). As a result of the Irish settlements, both purely ogam/Irish inscriptions, and also bilingual statements in Latin/Roman script and Irish/ogam script were frequently erected.

The filiation formula thus came to be adopted in western Britain, sometimes in combination with HIC IACIT ('here lies'). Whereas the filiation formula had pre-Christian roots, HIC IACIT and the cognate, IN HOC TUMULO [or SEPULCRO] IACIT ('in this mound [burial] lies') are considered to be unambiguously Christian. The strength of Irish influence in Wales may be judged from the fact that, out of 31 ogam (or mixed ogam + Latin) inscriptions, 13 used the filiation formula; whereas of 104 purely Latin inscriptions, as many as 71 incorporated a statement of filiation (Nash-Williams 1950, 6-10; Thomas 1994).

### 21.2.3 Other early western British inscriptions

A further group of western British inscriptions deserves mention because of their socio-political significance: those which commemorated kings and high nobles (illus 147a). These may be very terse: for instance: CAELEXTI[s] MONEDORIGI[s], '[memorial of] Caelextis (? = Heavenly one) mountain king', where 'mountain' may be a royal epithet like 'shield' or 'bulwark', meaning something like 'rugged barrier' (*ECMW*, 272). As a memorial to a noble we have, in both Latin/Roman and Irish/ogam, SIMILINI TOVISACI, '[memorial of] Similinus nobleman/royal minister'; literally Toisech, a long-lived Celtic/Pictish title or official rank (*ECMW*, 176). At the other extreme, the memorialist of Cadfan (father of that Cadwallon who slew Edwin and was himself slain by Oswald of Northumbria), described him as 'wisest and most renowned of all kings' (*ECMW*, 13).

Out of about 140 examples of the earliest class of Early Christian monuments in Wales, four bear crosses which have been carved contemporaneously. Fortunately for typological studies, three different types of cross are represented, and two of these may be dated on historical grounds (illus 147, b & c). The earlier of the two has a simple equal-armed cross, set in a circle which recalls the wreath of victory symbolizing Christ's victory over sin and death. The inscription reads, in ogam, VOTECORIGAS (genitive case); and on the face, MEMORIA VOTEPORIGIS PROTICTORIS, 'Shrine of Voteporix, Protector' (a Roman title; *ECMW*, 138). It is accepted that this is the Vortipor, king of Demetia, who was castigated by Gildas around the middle of the 6th century. The death of Vortipor, and the erection of the stone, may be placed early in



148  
Two styles of  
Christ's mono-  
gram.



the second half of that century.

The second cross-bearing stone is that in honour of Cadfan of Gwynedd, mentioned above. Working back from the death of Cadwallon, son of Cadfan, in AD 634, the Cadfan stone may be dated late in the 6th or early in the 7th century. The cross itself is a Latin cross, with splayed terminals and a long stem ending in a knobbed foot. The other two cross-slabs (*ECMW*, 101; 106) are broadly datable to the 6th century on the basis of their wording and the letter-forms. They both bear *Chi-Rho* crosses: that is, a cross in the form of the monogram X (*Chi*) and R (*Rho*) for the

first two Greek letters of Christos (illus 148; see *Encyclopaedia*: 'Epigraphy', 279b; 'Monogram', 568b). In these two cases (as was quite common), the *Chi* was turned through 45° to blend with the upright arm of the *Rho*: the so-called monogrammatic cross. It should be added that on all four of these stones, the physical relationship between the cross and the lettering argues for the contemporaneity of symbol and inscription.

From this broad survey of Ireland and western Britain, we may now turn to the development of monuments within the main area of this study, namely, northern Britain.

### 21.3 EARLY INSCRIPTIONS AND CROSS-SLABS AMONG THE NORTHERN BRITONS AND THE SCOTS

For perhaps a century and a half before Edwin's baptism in the river Glen in AD 627, Britons living south of the Firth of Forth, and also in south-west Scotland, were setting up stones with Latin inscriptions; organizing regular cemeteries for the decent burial of the dead; and worshipping in churches which have left their record in place-names. These Britons were, of course, Christians, though Bede dismissed them as 'infidels, heretics', *perfidis*, and applauded the slaughter of 1200 of their monks by the pagan king Æthelfrith (*HE* ii, 2).

Our concern here is with the inscribed stones. The evidence for these is found only north of the Tyne, but it is reasonable to believe that there were Christian communities, descendants of romanized Britons, throughout the region which became Northumbria, just as there were in Kent. Out of the five relevant stones bearing inscriptions, all but one use the HIC IACIT formula. Three of these also incorporate a version of the filiation formula.

149  
a) The Selkirkshire  
cross figure  
(National Museums  
of Scotland); b) The  
Manor Water,  
Peebles, inscrip-  
tion: + CONINIE  
(Crown Copyright  
RCAHMS).

### 21.3.1 Inscriptions in south-west Scotland

The one inscription which has neither formula comes from Manor Water (Peebles: RCAHMS 1967, no 376; here illus 149a). The inscription, in two lines, bears the name CONINIE, but the second line is too damaged for a certain reading. The major interest of the stone is its equal-armed cross with expanded terminals. On the evidence of letter-forms and the supposed etymology of the name, a date in the 6th century is suggested. We may recall here Bede's erroneous statement that no symbol of the Christian faith had been set up in Bernicia before Oswald erected his wooden cross on the eve of the battle of Heavenfield in AD 634 (*HE* iii, 2).

No less important than this early carved cross is the rough slab with a carving of a human figure from Over Kirkhope (Selkirkshire: RCAHMS 1957, no 65 and fig 1; here illus 149, b). The figure, crudely executed, wears a tunic so short as to reveal the male genitals. The most important aspect is that the arms are bent, so that the hands, with outspread fingers, rise slightly above the shoulders. This is a characteristic attitude of Christian iconography: the *orans* position. In simple terms, the attitude is one of prayer, but the full significance is both subtle and profound, one element being a prayer of thanks for salvation (*Encyclopaedia*, 615). A 6th-, or even 5th-, century date is suggested. For all its crudeness the stone may be hailed as the earliest vernacular figure-carving in northern Britain. It has, however, no immediate successors.

Already by the mid-5th century, and extending into the 6th and 7th centuries, Christian-Latin inscriptions were also being carved in south-west Scotland (Collingwood 1925; Thomas 1992). We have already encountered the settlement, both religious and secular, at Whithorn. A second one, known only from its Christian monuments, was established in the same period at Kirkmadrine some 24 crow-miles (38 km) to the west across Luce Bay.

The earliest known inscription comes from Whithorn (illus 150). It is quite Roman in form, except for its opening phrase, TE DOMINUM LAUDAMUS, 'We praise thee Lord', which presumably comes from the liturgy of the Church. The main inscription appears to be a memorial to a father and daughter, secular members of a Christian community. Thomas, however, rejects this interpretation on linguistic grounds, and suggests that the slab 'formed part...of a building...probably...a church...in the 5th century' (Thomas 1992, 3-7).

The other stones, three from Kirkmadrine and one from Whithorn, all bear a monogrammatic *Chi-rho* set in a circle. As noted above, this represents a wreath of victory, symbolizing Christ's victory over death. The three from Kirkmadrine can be broadly matched in 6th-century Wales, but it also suggests Continental, and perhaps specifically Gaulish, connections. The second Whithorn stone, in contrast, has some individual features which point to the 8th century, by which time Whithorn was the seat of an Anglian bishop.

150  
Galloway  
inscriptions:  
left, Whithorn;  
right, Kirkmadrine  
(after Macalister  
1945, with  
modifications).



### 21.3.2 Early stones in Dál Riata

As a group, then, these stones, erected by the Britons of western Galloway and of the border counties of Scotland, mark one early phase in the erection of cross-carved stones in northern Britain. For a second group, slightly later but nonetheless broadly overlapping, we must turn to Dál Riata.

There, the erection of rough stone stele, incised with various forms of linear cross, probably begins with the mission of Columba in the later 6th century AD. Such crosses then continue, together with more developed monuments, through later centuries. The large numbers and varieties are well revealed in the pages of six volumes of Royal Commission *Inventories* (RCAHMS 1971; 1975; 1980; 1982; 1984; 1992). As might be expected, there is a major concentration on Iona itself, but there are also important clusters on some other islands, as well as on the Atlantic-facing coasts of mainland Argyll.

151  
Iona: Chi-Rho  
grave-marker:  
above, top edge  
which reads LAPIS  
ECHODI; below,  
Chi-Rho face  
(*Crown copyright  
RCAHMS*).

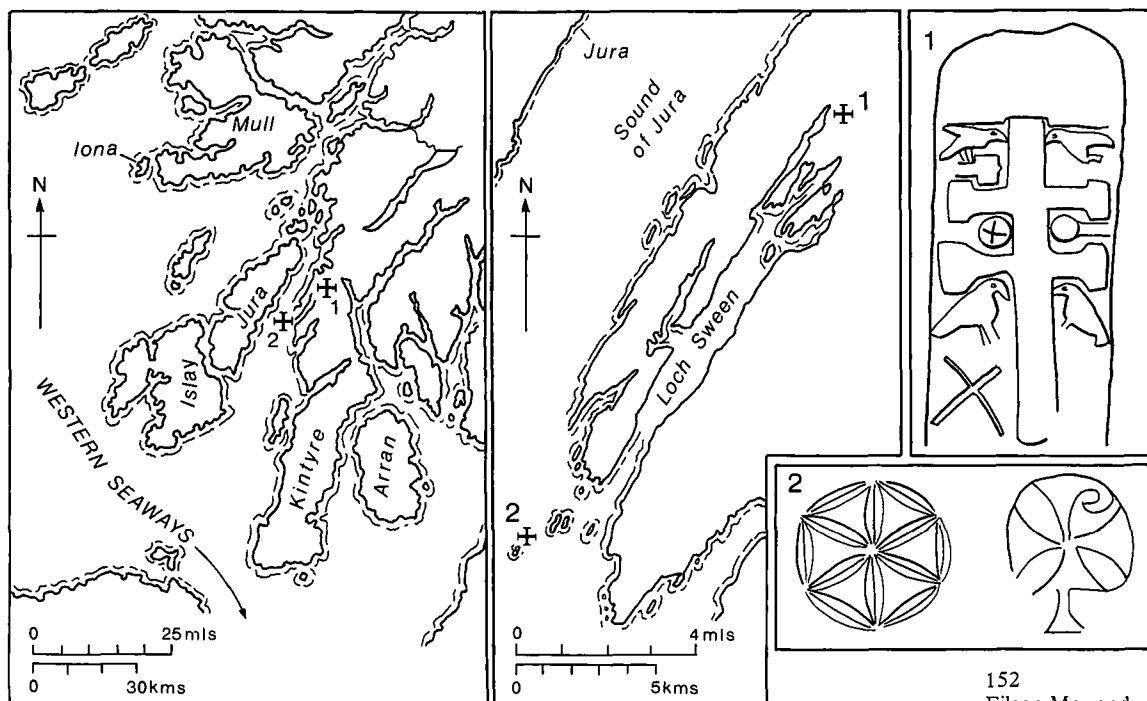


The linear incised monuments include both plain and ringed crosses. Unfortunately the very simplicity does not lend itself to typological arrangement. Moreover, unlike the early monuments of the Britons, the Dál Riata crosses only rarely bear inscriptions which might help to date them. An interesting exception from Iona is a small wedge-shaped slab, with its entire face occupied by a cross with expanded terminals, and a hook at the top right marking the *rho* of a monogrammatic *Chi-rho* (illus 151). Along the top edge of the stone is the inscription LAPIS ECHODI, 'stone of Echoid', an Irish personal name; the epigraphy suggests a 7th-century date (RCAHMS 1982, 182, no 22).



Two further examples of smaller carved crosses may serve as examples for many others, especially in Dál Riata (illus 152). At Kilmory Oib, towards the root of the Kintyre peninsula, is an isolated, rather roughly carved stone (RCAHMS 1992, 172-3, no 78). The rear face has an incised cross, while the front is carved with a cross and other motifs in false relief. The cross is unusual in having two cross-arms. Omitting obscure elements, there are clearly two pairs of birds, respectively above and below the cross-arms, all four looking towards the stem. These may be doves, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, or peacocks, symbols of Christ's resurrection because the flesh of dead peacocks was reputed to be incorruptible. The birds, however, are too weathered to allow certain identification.

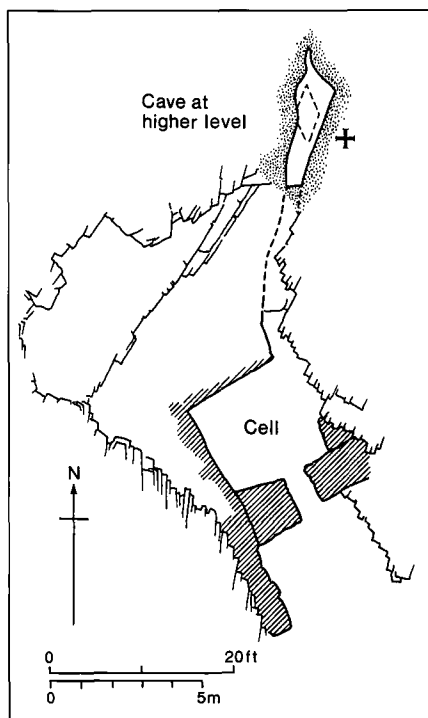
These two elements, the two cross-arms and the pairs of birds, are exceptionally rare in Britain, but the double cross-arms occur throughout the Mediterranean as far east as Byzantium. Moreover, the theme of birds, especially in pairs, also occur in Gaul. They frequently sit among foliage—originally a pre-Christian theme—or peck at vines, perhaps symbolizing the Eucharist. At Kilmory Oib they may be feasting on the implied body of the crucified Christ.



152  
Eilean Mor and  
Kilmory: locations  
and carvings (after  
RCAHMS 1992,  
172-3).

The Kilmory Oib site has also its own special significance for Insular Christian ceremonial. From the foot of the cross flows a perennial stream. This recalls, firstly, the importance of holy springs and wells for the pagan Celts (Green 1986, espec chap 5); and secondly, Pope Gregory's instructions to Augustine that pagan shrines should be turned from the worship of devils to that of the true God (*HE* i, 30). This would be particularly appropriate in the case of a spring, a ready source of water for the service of baptism, as is clear from instances already cited from Columba's missions.

Kilmory Oib is no doubt a special case, imbued with both pagan and Christian significance at a European level. Some 7m/19km distant is another example of Mediterranean or Gaulish symbolism, carved on the wall of a cave (illus 152; 153) leading off from a small squarish cell, on Eilean Mor at the mouth of Loch Sween (RCAHMS 1992, 69-70, no 33). This comprises two versions of the monogram of Jesus Christ. One is the most common version of the *Chi-rho*, the first two letters of *Christos*, described above (21.2.3). The other, sometimes called a marigold or a hexa-



153  
Eilean Mor: cave  
and cell (after  
RCAHMS 1992,  
68).

foil, combines the two initial letters, *Iota* and *Chi* of *Iesous Christos* (illus 148). This is especially common in southern Gaul. In Britain these monograms are not widespread except in the west (but note the hexafoils on the base of the Capheaton hanging-bowl, 19.1.2, illus 124). But Gaulish and Mediterranean contacts should not surprise us in these two cases. The Kilmory Oib cross stands less than ½ mile (0.8km) from the headwaters of Loch Sween, while Eilean Mor is at its exit. So each site had easy access to the western seaways, and so ultimately to Gaul and the Mediterranean (8:1). It needs no stressing that these symbols had quite a different appeal from scenes of David, Jonah, or the Desert Fathers, but it was one that was no less compelling. It gave the satisfaction of belonging to a small chosen group, bound together by the understanding of an arcane symbolism.

It should be stressed that this brief summary does scant justice to the number and variety of these simple early crosses in Argyll. (For a larger account, see the Royal Commission *Inventories* of Argyll, espec. Argyll 7, 1992).

### 21.3.3 Ringed crosses

Before turning to the Pictish carved stones, some comment must be made on the significance of the ringed crosses which have been noticed in Wales (illus 147) and Galloway (illus 150), and which will feature largely in Chapter 23. We shall find that there is some variation in the crosses in Dál Riata; but the comparable variety within the Pictish crosses, both in shape and ornamentation, was much larger. The most important difference was between the ringed and ringless heads. Some 35% of the Pictish Class II heads are ringed, either with a true circle, or with four arcs set between the transom and the shaft, the so-called quadrilobate form.

There are conflicting views on the origins of the ring-head. It has been suggested that such crosses 'are really processional crosses turned into stone'; and an argument in favour of this is that the bosses (which are indeed more common on Irish examples than among the Picts) represent the glass- or enamel-decorated bosses which had a functional role in the construction of processional crosses (Henry 1965, 140). A distinctly mechanistic interpretation is that the ring is to support the horizontal arm of the cross as is certainly the case of the curving struts with which the damaged cross of St John on Iona was repaired (RCAHMS 1982, 17-8; 200-1); but such an explanation is of course irrelevant to the rings of the Pictish cross-stele and -slabs.

An alternative explanation for the carved ring-head looks to the incised rings which we have seen rarely in Wales in the 6th century (Nash-Williams 1950, 14-6 with fig 3; here illus 147). More important is the group in south-west Scotland, of 6th- to 8th-century date, because on these the ring encloses not a simple cross but a monogrammatic *Chi-rho*; that is to say, one in which the *Chi* has been turned through 45° (illus 151). Moreover, one of these bears the letters 'A et W', that is Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbolizing Christ as in *Revelation* 1.8 (illus 150).

To penetrate the deeper significance of this symbolism, we must turn to the iconography of the *Trophy of the Cross*. An outstanding example forms the central motif of a mid-4th-century sarcophagus now in the Vatican Museum (sarcophagus 171: (Milburn 1988, 72 with fig 40; *Atlas*, 143, illus 466 & 467; here illus 154,1). The lower part of this icon shows a simple wooden cross, flanked by two soldiers in postures reminiscent of defeated barbarians on Imperial triumphs. The line of the cross-shaft continues

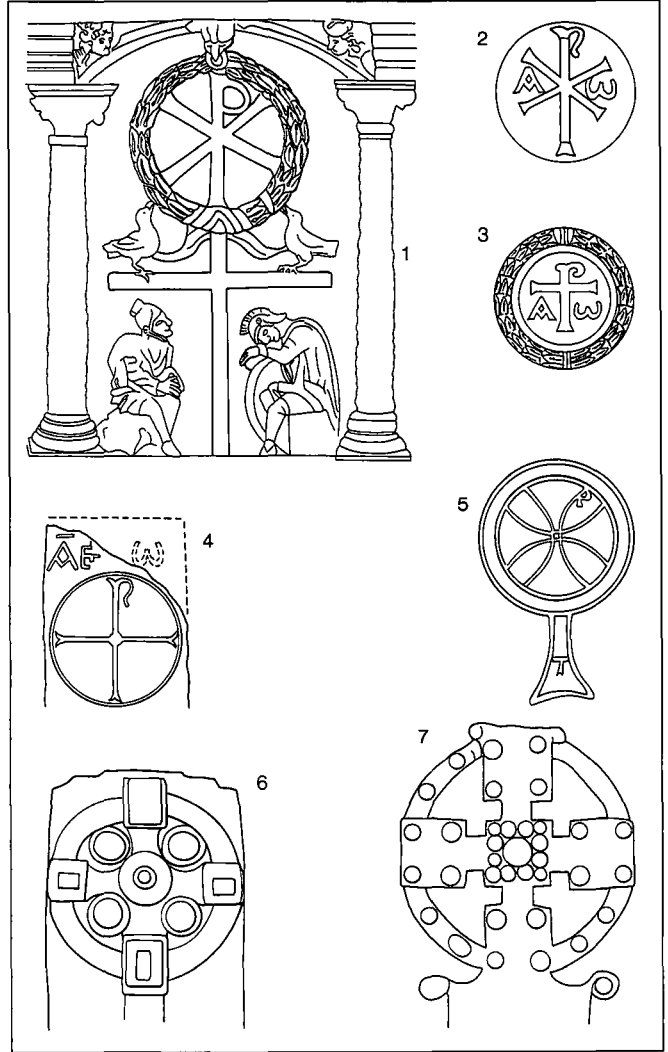
upwards to form the stem of the *rho* of a *Chi-rho*. The *Chi-rho* itself is surrounded by an elaborate wreath, appropriate to the victor in war: in this case, symbolizing Christ's triumph on the Cross of Golgotha over sin and death.

Simpler Mediterranean versions of the wreathed and encircled *Chi-rho* and *Alpha* and *Omega* can be seen on the top and side panels of a sarcophagus at Ravenna (Milburn 1988, fig 45; here illus 154, 2 & 3; for a fuller discussion of this symbolism of Christ, see *Encyclopaedia* 'Epigraphy', 279b and 'Monogram', 568b). The ultimate derivation of Insular examples from the Mediterranean are clearly demonstrated in illustration 154, nos 4 & 5.

The association of the cross with the concepts of Christ's battle with sin and death, and his victory over them, can be demonstrated in other Insular contexts through verbal references. Bede relates that when Augustine went to meet king Æthelbert of Kent, the monks carried a silver cross as a battle standard: *crucem per vexillo ferentes* (HE i, 25). On the early 8th-century Bewcastle cross, the first line of the main runic inscription may be translated '+ This token of victory', or alternatively 'victory cross, victory memorial' (Page 1988, 65). The 'Heroic' runic inscription on the Ruthwell cross does not explicitly make this point: but a recent commentator stresses its message for a contemporary audience of the 'efficacy of Christ's historical triumph over Satan and death...upon the Cross...(SAJ Bradley 1995, 4-5). Finally, Alcuin in his poem on 'The Holy Cross' emphasises that, because of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, 'he took the spoils of victory, *praedam*' (Godman 1985, 134-41, ll 6-7).

## 21.4 PICTISH SYMBOL STONES

Meanwhile, the third Insular Celtic nation—the Picts—also appear to have adopted the filiation-formula in order to make permanent public statements in stone. These statements were not expressed verbally in the form 'A son of B', but in regular pairs of highly stylized symbols. The introduction of the filiation-concept to the Picts is likely to have occurred in a zone of contact either side of the Firth of Forth. We may infer the presence of Pictish speakers south of the Forth, in the area of present West Lothian, as late as Bede's day. At Kirkliston, near Edinburgh, a filiation inscription in Latin was set up



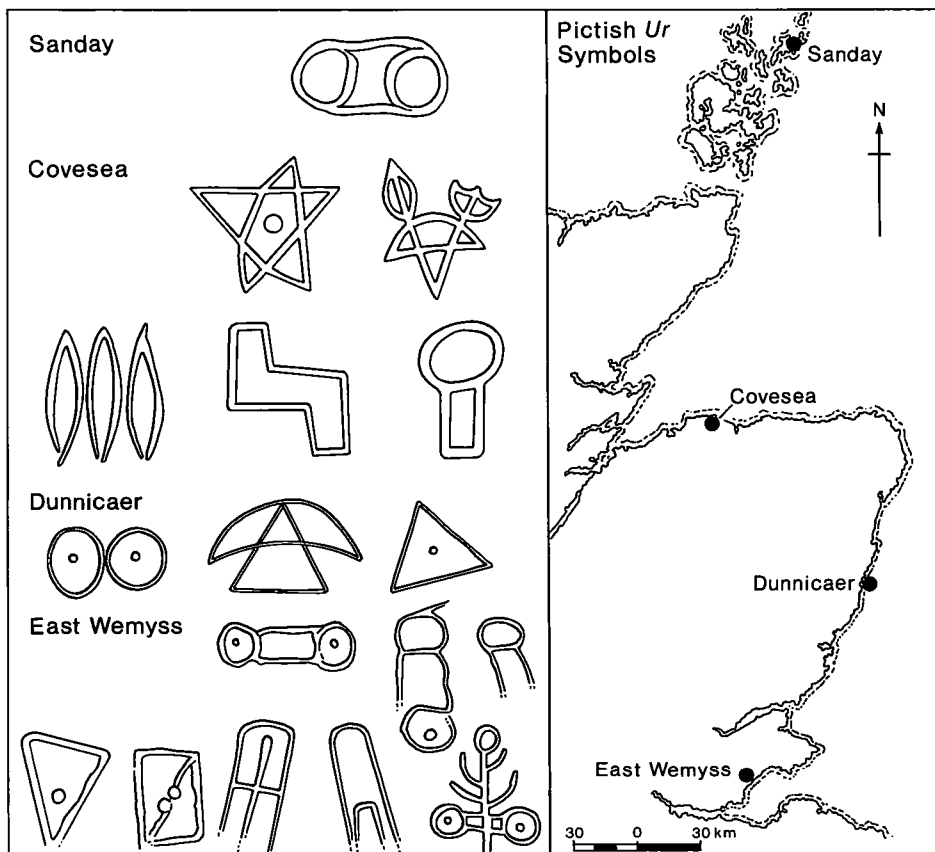
154  
Ringed crosses  
from Rome and  
Ravenna to  
Pictland: 1, Rome;  
2-3, Ravenna;  
4, Kirkmadrine;  
5, Whithorn;  
6-7, Aberlemno.

in a long-cist cemetery, a class of funerary monument which was common both sides of the Forth. Significantly, a stone bearing two Pictish symbols is recorded as having been found in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh (*ECMS*, fig 438).

This is not to suggest that the invention of the actual symbols had an origin around the Firth of Forth. Indeed, the earliest known carved Pictish symbol was found in the excavation of a multi-period settlement at Pool, Sanday, Orkney (Hunter 1990a, 185-7, Ill 10.8). This had been incised on a small slab (maximum length 0.76m (30in)), which had been reused as a paving slab in a floor of the late 5th/early-6th century.

The symbol itself is a crude version of a very common, and often highly ornate, symbol, the double-disk (illus 155). The crudeness of the carving, and the unusual use of a small slab, taken in conjunction with the early date, suggest that we are seeing here a beginning of the whole repertory of Pictish symbols. Other primitive or rudimentary (*Ur*) symbols have been recognized in untypical contexts, such as caves at Covesea on the Moray Firth and at East Wemyss on the Fife shore, and also on a sea-stack at Dunnicaer, Kincardine (Alcock 1996). It seems likely that these symbols had been invented sporadically in the late 5th and early 6th centuries, widely along the coast of Pictland. By the 7th century AD they had become both sophisticated and highly standardized, both in design and context. It was these which were used to make filiation statements.

155  
Pictish primitive  
(*Ur*) symbols and  
their locations.



### 21.4.1 Pictish symbols and their meaning

It would be inappropriate here to describe the symbol stones at length, especially because the major illustrated catalogue, originally published in 1903, has been republished in facsimile form (*ECMS*; briefer, but well illustrated discussions in Stevenson 1955; Henderson 1967; L & J Laing 1993; Sutherland 1994; major bibliography, Nicoll (ed) 1995). In brief, the primary group of symbols, Class I, consists of a basic set of about 24 invented, stylized motifs. Almost half of them occur in pairs pecked or incised on rough boulders or undressed stone slabs and pillars, very like those used for ogam inscriptions and Welsh and Cornish Class I monuments. The outline symbols were frequently infilled with scrolls, peltae and other curvilinear motifs, creating elaborate decorations (for representative examples, illus 156).

The first systematic illustration and analysis of the Pictish carved stones was by John Stuart in 1856 and 1867. (For a full account of early illustrations of Pictish stones, RCAHMS 1994). Stuart called the motifs not designs, ornaments or decoration, but 'symbols' (Stuart 1856, vi-vii). By this he evidently meant, as in a dictionary definition, 'something that stands for, represents or denotes something else, not by exact resemblance, but by some conventional relation' (SED 1933, sv 'symbol'). Consequently, in commenting on the differing arrangements of the symbols on the stones, he concludes that this 'seems to imply a meaning and intention in the arrangement'.

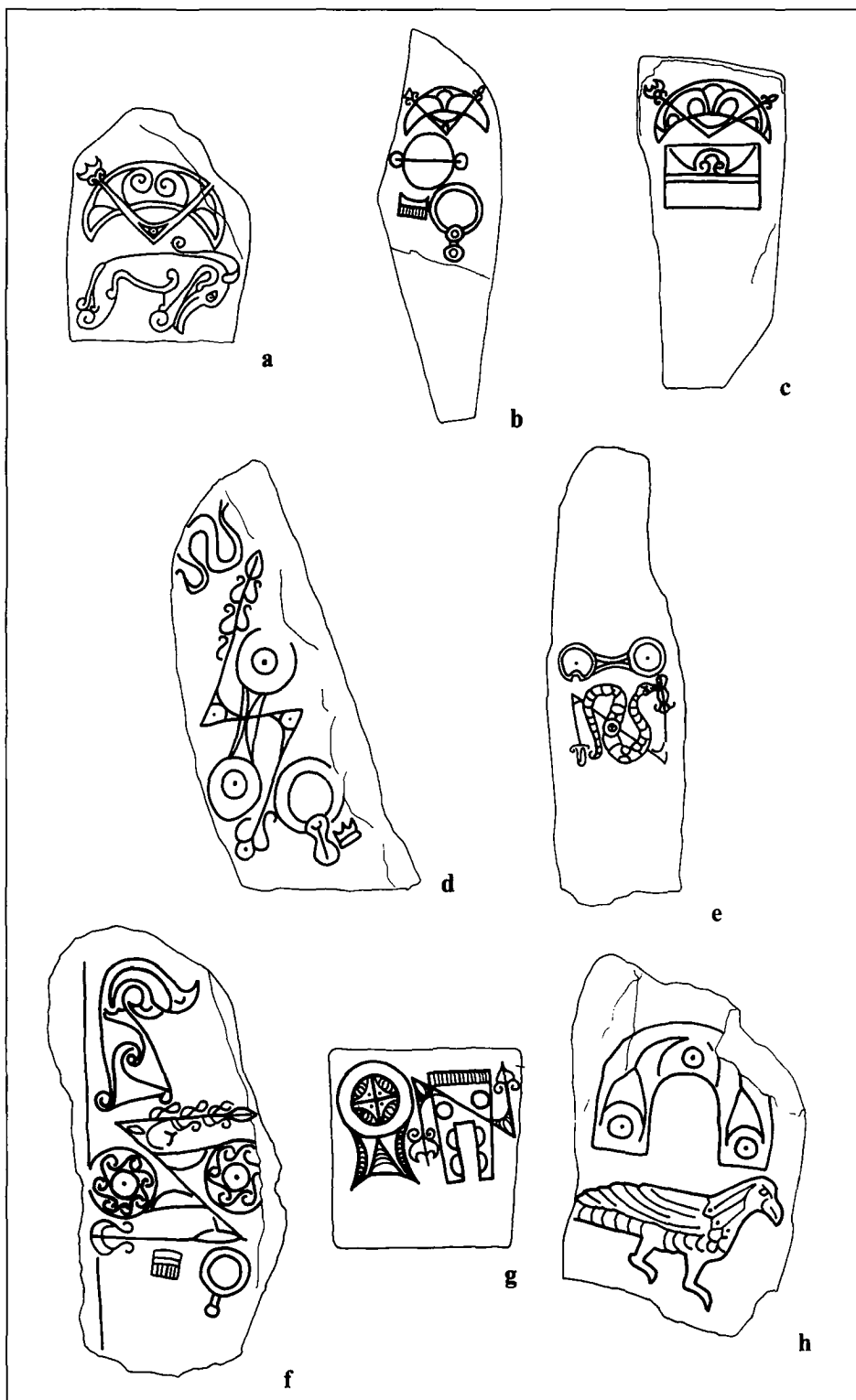
This plain statement that the symbol stones conveyed a meaning and an intention was largely ignored in the following century. Discussion was conducted within chapters headed 'Pictish Art', and in art-historical terms of origins, influences, typologies, 'declining symbols', and chronologies. Against this scholarly background, Charles Thomas advanced the revolutionary idea in the 1960s that the symbols were 'not merely artistic motifs but primitive pictograms', which conveyed 'simple messages, mostly commemorative of the dead' (1963, 31). From this it was a short step to the view that 'presumably, the stones are related to the memorials of Britain and the ogams of Ireland, and in this case the pictures' [ie of recognizable objects and animals] 'and symbols may stand for the names and possibly ranks or personal relationships of the persons commemorated': that is to say, the filiation formula (Alcock 1971, 1989, 276; for a different approach published at that time, Henderson 1971).

The advantage of this interpretation is that it normalizes the relation of one major aspect of Pictish social organization and practice with those current among the Insular Celtic societies as a whole. In this it makes a significant contribution to the demythologizing and demystification of the Picts. It is true that we know neither the sound-values nor the verbal meaning of the symbols, and to that extent their full significance remains opaque to us.

Two groups of incised designs are at one level not opaque, in the sense that we can immediately recognize them. These are the mirrors and combs, and the realistic animals. The mirror (which may occur without the comb) is normally regarded as a female qualifier for an accompanying symbol-pair, which might thereby be interpreted as '(memorial of) A daughter of B'. But there is no body of evidence in support of this, and the concept of a female qualifier appears to be based principally on a stereotype of female vanity: Thomas refers (1964, 43) to the 'intrinsic femininity of these objects'. There appears to be no supportive evidence in the case of mirrors; and as for combs, grave-associations, iconography and literary sources make it abundantly plain that

156

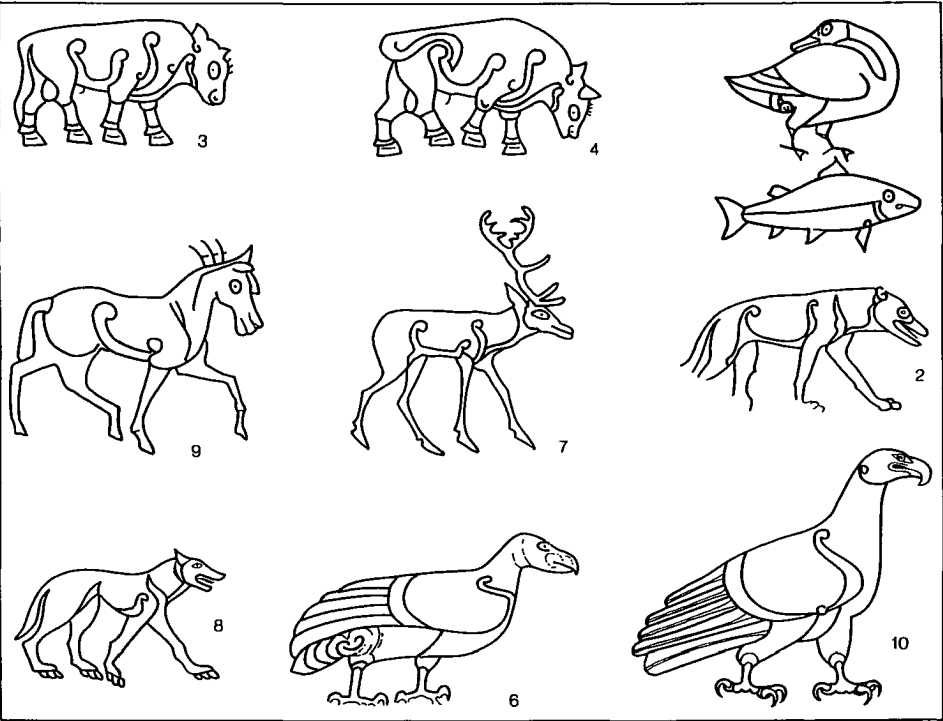
Characteristic  
Pictish symbol  
stones, Class I;  
a, Strathmartine,  
Angus;  
b, Inveravon,  
Banff;  
c, Clynekirkton,  
Sutherland;  
d, Aberlemno,  
Angus; e, Mill of  
Newton,  
Aberdeens;  
f, Dunnichen,  
Angus; g, Arndilly,  
Banff;  
h, Strathpeffer,  
Ross (after  
*ECMS*).



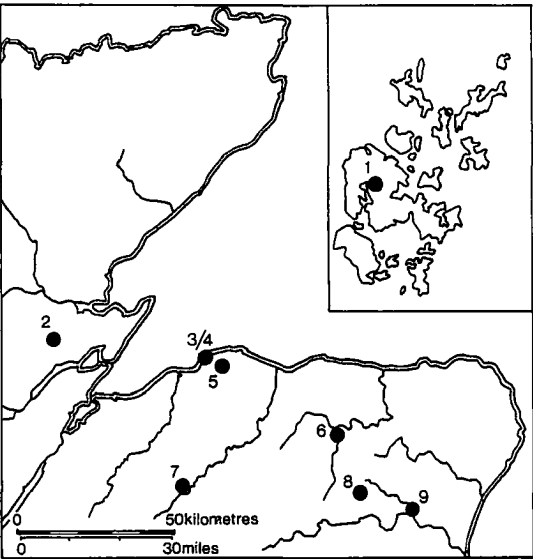
combs have no gender connotations (Alcock 1963, 156-8; A MacGregor 1985, 72). MacGregor indeed emphasizes the hygienic need for combs by both sexes.

21.4.2 The animal carvings

Finally, we must consider the carvings of animals, which differ from other ‘symbols’ in that they are not inventions of the human mind, but have an objective, external existence



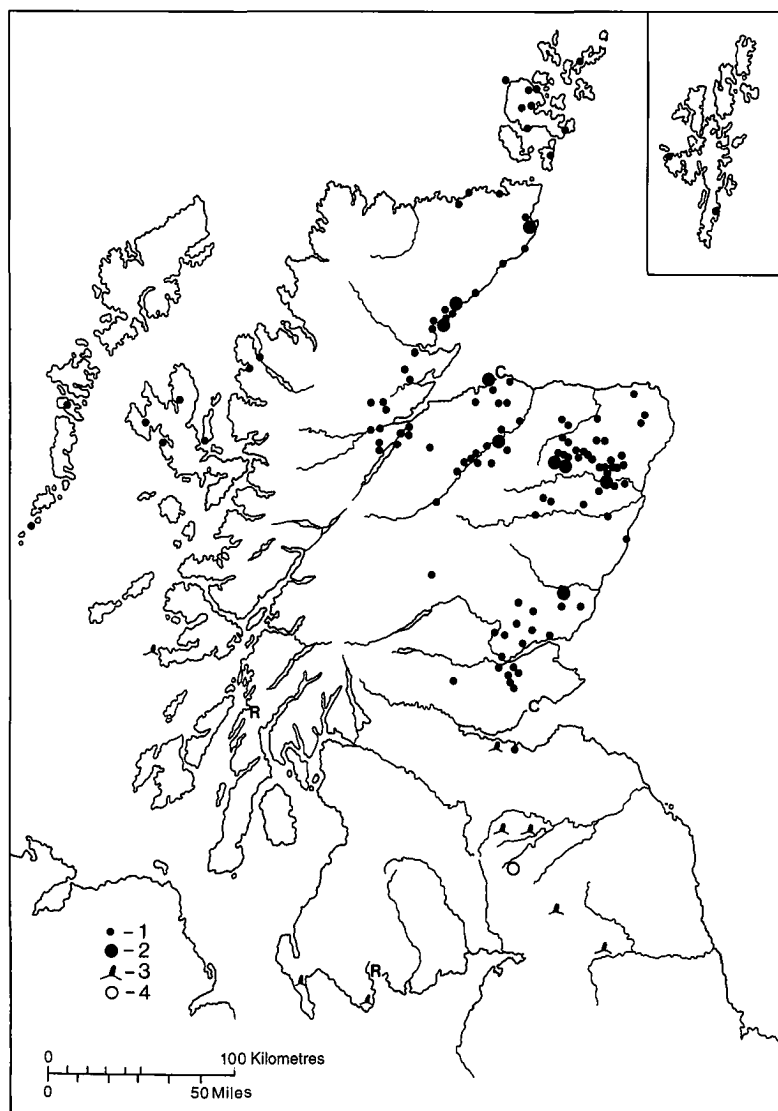
157  
The work of the supposed Pictish ‘Animal Master’.  
1: eagle, Garth, Orkney (not illustrated);  
2 dog/wolf, Ardross, Argyll;  
3 & 4: bulls, Burghead, Moray;  
5: goose and salmon, Easterton of Roseisle, Moray;  
6: eagle, Tillytarmont, Aberdeenshire;  
7: stag, Granton, Moray; 8: dog/wolf, Newbigging Leslie, Aberdeenshire;  
9: horse, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire;  
10: eagle, Corpus MS 197B.



which is observed and then depicted (illus157). The animals favoured include both wild and domestic, and may be listed in order of frequency: salmon (11), bull (9), eagle (6), goose (3 or 2), canines (2), boar (2), deer (1), horse (1). The depictions are mostly impressively life-like, and in the best examples there is a strong impression of movement. It may even be suggested that we may see the work of an individual craftsman, an ‘Animal Master’, whose work centred on north-eastern Pictland (Alcock 1998).

The lively and convincing depic-

tion of the animals argues for a level of close and sympathetic observation on the part of the carvers. This in turn suggests a high degree of empathy towards the selected animals. Was this because they had collectively a special character admired by the Picts? If so, it may be because they were powerful beasts, or in the case of the migratory salmon and geese, mysterious ones. But beyond this speculation, we cannot penetrate the deeper significance of the animal depictions.



158

Map of the early phases of carving  
1, Pictish Class I, singletons; 2, more  
than one stone; 3, principal monastic  
settlements; 4, Selkirkshire Orans  
stone; C, caves; R, rock-carvings.  
Sources: RCAHMS 1994b; OS  
*Britain in the Dark Ages*, 1996.

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## CARVING IN STONE, BONE AND IVORY: THE MATURE PHASES

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### 22.1 HIGH CROSSES IN GREATER BERNICIA

From the later 7th century AD, especially as a result of major church building by bishops Wilfrid and Benedict, we see the beginnings of architectural carving in Bernicia, largely of an ornamental character. At Hexham, numerous fragments hint at the embellishment of the church (Cramp 1984a, 183-92, pls 179-188): apart from geometric motifs, these include rosettes, vine- and plant-scrolls, and animal friezes with a recognizable boar and lion. At Monkwearmouth, in a secondary phase, the porch had turned baluster shafts. But there was also an element of potent iconography here; for on the jamb below the baluster shafts a pair of confronted, intertwined dragons was carved in shallow relief. Kitzinger (1993, 4-5) saw the significance of these as guardians protecting the church. But since dragons may also be associated with the Devil, it may alternatively be believed that these were evil creatures, which had been fixed permanently in stone at the door, and were thereby kept out of the church.

More important than these architectural fragments were free-standing high crosses. These tend nowadays to be treated as art-works: but they had been erected as public statements of faith and doctrine, proclaiming the great mysteries of Christ's sacrifice for mankind, and the ultimate triumph of the resurrection—in modern terms their equivalents would be bill-boards and advertisement hoardings. This is made clear in a runic inscription at Bewcastle, which refers to a victory memorial: + *thissigbecn* (Page 1988, 65). Apart from the triumph of the cross, carvings conveyed other symbolic or pictorial messages, and could thus serve as focal points for teaching and preaching (7.1 above).

The high crosses are now largely fragments. The account given here therefore focuses on a small group of examples which are outstanding largely because of their relative completeness: Hexham, Bewcastle, and Ruthwell. In each case there are controversies—largely unresolved—about dating and external influences. These are omitted here, in order to concentrate on the monuments themselves.

#### 22.1.1 Hexham

It was at Hexham, centrally placed within Bernicia, that Bishop Wilfrid founded a monastery and a great church in the 670s AD. Apart from a stone bishop's throne, one of the chief treasures of Hexham is the so-called Acca's Cross, named in honour of the early 8th-century bishop who may (or may not) have commissioned its erection.

The head of the cross is missing, but the height of the reconstructed shaft is 3.58m (11ft 9in); it tapers gently from about 0.37m by 0.33m (14in x 8in). About a quarter of the shaft is missing, as well as a longer section of the east face. Much of that face bore an

inscription, which is now largely illegible, and certainly yields nothing intelligible. Its assumed reference to Acca (first mooted in 1888), who was bishop and abbot at Hexham from AD 709 to 731, can hardly be said to provide a firm date, but the second quarter of the 8th century is currently suggested (Cramp 1984a, 176).

The preserved faces of the cross all bear refined formal patterns composed of one or two vine stems, which spring from the base of the cross and create oval or round medallions. These contain bunches of grapes, with subtle variations from one medallion to another. Occasionally the arrangement of the vine tendrils and bunches of grapes seems to suggest 'hidden' crosses, but the suggestion is far from emphatic. Above the vine-medallions, the shaft begins to taper towards the cross-head. Here it is embellished with rows of pellets, reminiscent of metalwork.

Indeed, the delicacy of carving of the vines has been considered to imply a metalwork model. But there is no agreement as to whether that model was Italian or Insular. Cramp (1984a) has even pointed to ornamental parallels in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. She concludes that Acca's cross represents the introduction to Northumbria of a fully developed style, which then set a new fashion (*ibid*, 176).

These comments, of course, reflect the interests of the modern art historian. But it is legitimate to ask 'What did this very formal depiction of a foreign plant mean to an 8th-century Northumbrian?' The question is the more significant because, unlike other Insular crosses which have some pictures to interest the lay viewer, the extant part of the shaft has the purest of abstract symbolism. It is, of course, possible that the missing head bore a crucifixion scene—or even, as at Iona, a Virgin and Child with angels.

This, however, is mere speculation. We must confine our interpretation to the vine-clusters. The vine-scroll motif has a high antiquity in the Mediterranean. In Christian symbolism, it may refer to the wine of the Eucharist. But far more important is Christ's direct statement: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener...you [the disciples] are the branches...This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples' (John, 15:1-8).

The roots of this symbolism lie in the Old Testament, in 'The Song of the Vineyard' of Isaiah. The prophet declares 'The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel' (Isaiah, 5:7). In other words, there was an equation between the Lord's vineyard and the tribes of Israel, as God's Chosen People. From the early 8th century AD there may have been a special significance in this for the English nation, or at least for those, mostly religious, who were familiar with the writings of Bede. This may indeed account for the great popularity of the vine-scroll on Northumbrian crosses, a popularity which is not matched in Dál Riata or Pictland.

This suggestion is based on a phrase in the first book of the *Ecclesiastical History* (*HE* i, 22). Bede has been lamenting the failure of the Britons to preach the word of faith to the Saxons or Angles who inhabited Britain beside them. 'But God did not desert his people whom he had foreknown', *plebem suam quam praescivit*. In other words, Bede regarded the English people as the true inheritors of the vineyard of the Lord Almighty.

### 22.1.2 Bewcastle

The Bewcastle cross (illus 159) was set up at about 152m (500ft) OD on the western

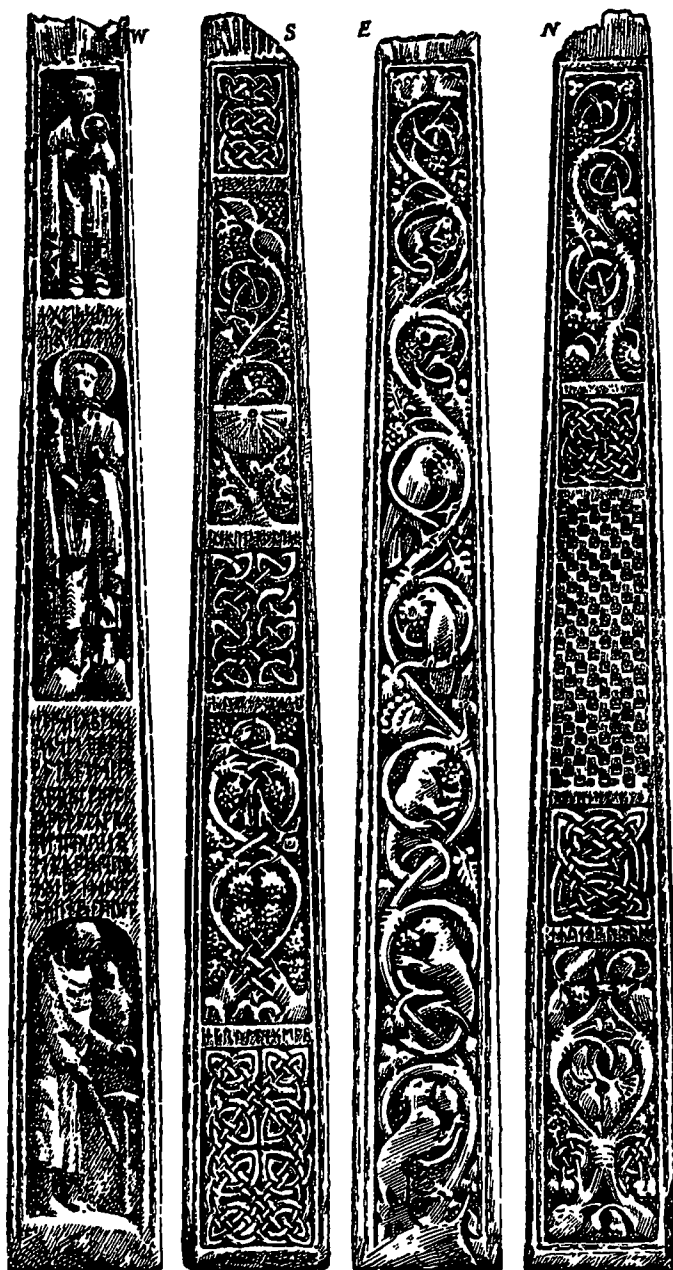
slopes of the spine of northern England. The location was a long-deserted Roman auxiliary fort, whose ramparts may subsequently have housed a monastery. Like Acca's cross, that at Bewcastle has lost its head. The carved motifs are considerably more varied than those on the Hexham cross. The two sides do indeed bear both double and single strands of vine-scroll. This is more fleshy, less like coils of wire, than that on Acca's cross. Moreover, it does not run from top to bottom, but is interspersed with thin interlace, forming saltire-crosses, exactly like many in the Lindisfarne Gospels. On the left side, there is even an extensive chequer design of lands and recesses.

On the back of the shaft is a new motif: a continuous rising vine, inhabited by feeding animals. Some of these are realistic birds, but other animals, which at first sight look like squirrels, have no hind legs. This is an Insular version of a common Mediterranean theme, in which birds—often peacocks—feed on grape-vines which often spring from a chalice. In such cases there is a clear reference to the Eucharist. In general it is believed that the motif represents the souls of the faithful departed feeding on the fruits of paradise.

The front of the cross introduces another new theme: human figures. At the top of the shaft is a man carrying an animal, probably a lamb; below that is a nimbed figure standing on two animal heads; then a runic inscription, so weathered as to be considered illegible; and finally a man looking half-left towards a large bird of prey. The figures are distinctly elongated, and the upper two look fully to the front. Stylistically they have a very Mediterranean—even Byzantine—appearance, which is increased by the setting of the two lower ones in round-headed niches. Readily transportable Mediterranean models could easily be found among Early Christian ivories, imported by Benedict, Wilfrid, or other unsung travellers to Rome.

In an obviously Christian context, the iconography of these figures may readily be expounded in several senses, which are not necessarily mutually compatible. The central, nimbed figure is frequently interpreted as Christ

159  
The Bewcastle cross, Cumbria  
(after Collingwood 1927).



treading on lion and dragon (Psalms, 91:13); but the comparable, and broadly contemporary, icon at Ruthwell has a Latin label which proclaims that 'beasts and dragons recognized (or acknowledged) in the desert the Saviour of the world'. This explanation for Ruthwell must also apply to Bewcastle.

At the top of the shaft is a figure usually identified as John the Baptist, distinguished by carrying a lamb, because when John first saw Jesus he declared 'Behold the Lamb of God' (John, 1:29). But the figure also carries a book, as does his counterpart at Ruthwell. This seems inappropriate for the Baptist; so Meyvaert has suggested (1992, 112-25) that on both crosses a reference to the Apocalyptic vision of Revelations 4 & 5, especially 5.6-7, is intended. Finally, at the bottom of the Bewcastle shaft we see John the Evangelist, distinguished by an eagle because his sublime Gospel soars like an eagle.

These explanations are, of course, those of a learned Christian, such as we might attribute to an 8th-century missionary using the cross as a focus for teaching and worship. But without such explanations, would an 8th-century layman apprehend the arcane, spiritual significance of the figures? Bailey has noted (1989, 100) the 'surprisingly secular' treatment of St John and his bird. We might readily agree with this, and conclude that St John would have been immediately recognizable to contemporary viewers as the King's Falconer; the status is inferrable because the bird is an eagle, as the crutch or perch demonstrates.

Following this line of thought: would a contemporary have seen the top figure as a peasant bringing a (compulsory) food-gift to the Lord King? And is not the central figure the Lord King himself, as the runes might have told a contemporary, even if modern scholarship can make nothing of them? And the King rightly appears to be trampling on his enemies, fittingly described by the learned monk Stephen as mere animals: *populi bestiales* (VW, 29)? And might an untutored layman think that the inhabited vine scroll depicted blackbirds and thrushes feeding on autumnal blackberries? Speculative though these comments are, they may take us closer to the mentality of the common people than any learned Christian exposition, ancient or modern, can do.

A further symbol is represented by the sundial on the right hand side of the cross. Sundials are not unknown on ecclesiastical sites, and it is sometimes suggested that they were needed to facilitate the observing of the Hours of services. Since, in northern regions, four of the Offices fall within the hours of darkness during much of the year, the utility of a sundial must have been limited. The sundial, like the hour-glass, was a reminder of the impermanence of worldly life, in contrast with the Eternal Church and the everlasting bliss of Heaven. So at Bewcastle the sundial is embedded in a vine scroll, and is set between crosses of unbroken, and therefore never-ending, eternal interlace (for a wider discussion of sundials, see PH Blair 1976, 72-5).

### 22.1.3 Ruthwell

The third of the great Bernician high crosses was erected beyond the north-western boundary of the original Bernicia, at Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire. This territory might have been conquered and colonised by the Angles in the mid-7th century; but if so, it may have been lost temporarily after Ecgrith's defeat and death at Nectansmere in AD 685. What is certain is that, by the time Bede wrote the *Ecclesiastical History* in 731, there was an Anglian bishop at Whithorn in the far west (HE v, 23). It is possible that the creation of the bishopric, the founding of a monastery at Hoddum and the erection of

the Ruthwell cross, both in Dumfriesshire, all occurred in the third decade of the 8th century.

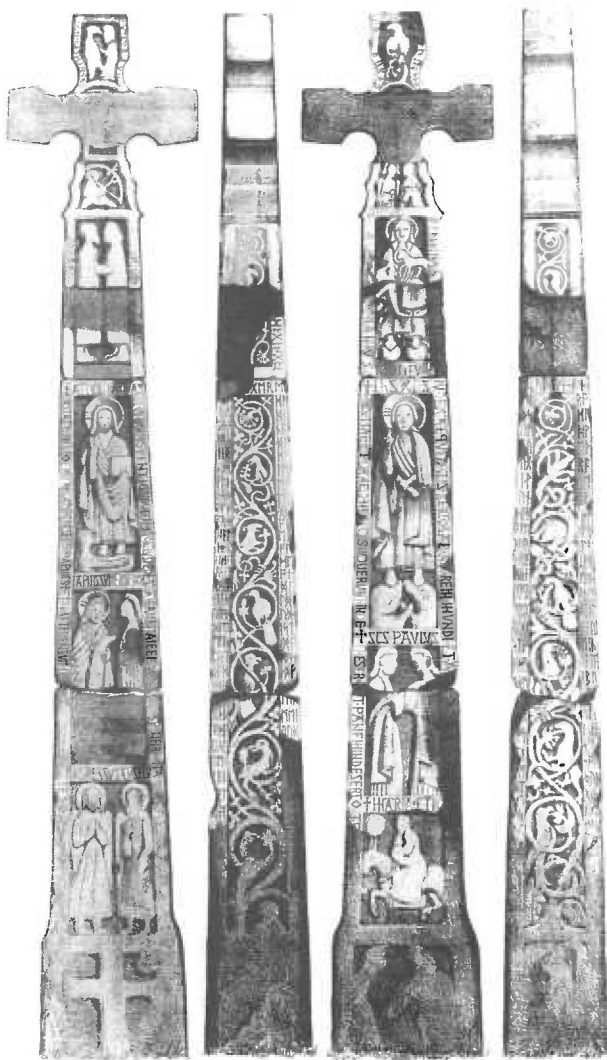
The Ruthwell cross (illus 160) is outstanding among the Insular crosses of the first half of the 8th century, primarily because of its extended iconographic programme. Despite considerable weathering over the centuries, iconoclastic damage in the 17th century, and misguided attempts to replace the lost transom, it is evident that the technical quality of the carving matched the religious inspiration of the pictorial content. As a station for preaching and teaching, the iconography was supported by scriptural texts in Latin. Moreover, on the narrow sides there is an Old English poem, written appropriately in runes, in which the cross itself speaks of Christ's sacrifice.

Inevitably, the cross has inspired much discussion and debate, to the extent that a recent bibliography runs to 33 pages (Cassidy & Kiefer 1992). It is obvious that the present account can only outline the main characteristics and matters of discussion, in the hope that these will guide readers to follow up items of individual interest.

### Details of images

The main shaft of the cross (ie below the cross-head) stands 5.28m (17ft 4in) high, tapering from 0.71m x 0.46m (2ft 4in x 1ft 6in) to 0.33 x 0.24m (1ft 1in x 9.5in). Each face of the shaft bears five panels of scriptural scenes, accompanied by Latin texts in good Roman capitals (for details and discussion of texts: Howlett 1992). There were probably five more icons each side of the cross-head, but of these only four remain. The sides are largely occupied by continuous inhabited vine scroll, framed by the Old English poem.

The scriptural scenes may be listed as follows, on the basis of identifications by Howlett (1992) and Meyvaert (1992). On the present south face (which may not be that of the original orientation), they are, from the bottom up: S1, the Crucifixion (a very rare icon at this time in Insular sculpture); S2, the Annunciation; S3, the healing of a blind man; S4, Mary Magdalene washing Christ's feet with her hair; S5, the Visitation, or perhaps Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus; S6, an archer. The north side begins, N1, with an obliterated panel, which to correspond with that on the south side may have shown the Deposition from the cross; N2, the Flight into Egypt (or more probably the return from Egypt?); N3, the Desert Fathers Paul and Anthony breaking bread in the desert; N4, Christ acknowledged by beasts in the desert; N5, John the Baptist with his lamb (or more probably a reference to an Apocalyptic vision?); N6,



160  
The Ruthwell  
cross, Dumfriesshire  
(after Stuart  
1867).

two unidentified figures.

Some parallels have been observed between the two faces. Thus S2 and N2 are devoted to the Virgin Mary; S3 and N3 depict miracles of healing and feeding; and S4 and N4 show the worship of Christ by the sinner Mary Magdalene and by the beasts in the desert. Such parallels strongly support the view that the obliterated scene N1 showed the Deposition from the Cross. There is also a strong 'desert' element in panels N2, 3 and 4. This has been held to reflect the strongly monastic character of the Northumbrian church in the later 7th and 8th centuries and, it should be added, that of the Ionan sphere of influence including Lindisfarne. Meyvaert has indeed speculated that the cross originally stood in the nave of a church, marking the separation of the lay congregation from the monks, with the so-called north face towards the brethren (Meyvaert 1992, espec 125 ff).

Turning now to the sides of the cross: these resemble Bewcastle, with its continuous vine scroll inhabited by realistic birds, and fantastic bipeds and quadrupeds with long, often bushy-tipped tails. The unique feature of the sides—indeed of the cross as a whole—is the Old English poem on the Crucifixion. This, the most powerful example of monumental literacy in an Insular language, consists of 24 half-lines in four verses. Its religious theme, combined with its Heroic ethos, can be epitomized in two quotations. By a bold stroke of creative imagination, the stone cross is made to speak for the wooden cross of Calvary: 'I raised up a powerful King, Lord of Heaven'. And Christ himself appears as an Early Historic king and hero: 'he wished to ascend on the gallows, valiant before men' (Howlett 1992, 82-91).



This catalogue of the Ruthwell carvings may serve to show something of their rich variety in both figural scenes and vegetable patterns, and to indicate also something of their deep religious themes. It has also hinted at a high degree of literacy in both Latin and Old English. The actual quality of the carving, however, can only be properly appreciated in the presence of the stone itself, with photographs and drawing as a poor second best (best available collection in Cassidy 1992). For a brief epitome, we cannot do better than to quote the words of a major Ruthwell scholar, who has declared it to be 'among the finest manifestations of Anglo-Saxon art (which) bids fair to being the most discussed example of early medieval sculpture in Europe' (Cassidy (ed) 1992, vii).

## 22.2 HIGH CROSSES, CROSS-SLABS AND STELE NORTH AND WEST OF THE FORTH AND CLYDE

Crosses in Northumbrian style were erected as far north as the shore of the Firth of Forth, as at Abercorn, West Lothian, and Aberlady, East Lothian (*ECMS*; 1993, 428: here *illus* 161). Beyond that, quite different schools of sculpture flourished in western lands under the influence of Iona, and among the Picts. Despite borrowings between west and east, as well as from Northumbria and Ireland, the characteristics of each school were quite distinctive. Moreover, the number of near-complete monuments in 8th-century Pictland greatly outweighs those of pre-Viking Bernicia.



161  
Fragment of cross-  
shaft, Aberlady,  
East Lothian  
(ECMS)

### 22.2.1 Pictish cross-slabs - Class II

The great innovation was the introduction of carving in relief, which was normally rather shallow. In Pictish art-history, this is one of the two criteria which is held to distinguish Class II from Class I: the other being the depiction of a cross (though never of a crucifixion) on one or both faces of a shaped stone. These may be roughly classed as slabs and stele, the distinction being that, on a stele, the centre of the cross-head is markedly above eye-height, so that the viewer has to look up in reverence.

It is sometimes suggested that the introduction of relief-carving to Pictland was at the hands of Bernician masons who were sent from Monkwearmouth-Jarrow when the Pictish king Nechtan asked for master-builders to build a stone church in the Roman manner (*HE* v, 21). This was in the decade before the death of Abbot Ceolfrith in AD 716. But many Class I stones had already displayed great skill with the sculptor's chisel, so that the first steps towards shallow relief cannot have been difficult for the Picts. As for the cross and other Christian images, Christianity had already been introduced to parts of Pictland by Columba and other missionaries in the late 6th century.

Such considerations undermine attempts to fix a date for the inception of Pictish Class II. Moreover, it cannot be argued that the introduction of carving in relief drove out the technique of incised lines. Many symbols on Class II slabs are partly incised. Indeed, the two stones at Glamis have incised symbols on the rear and relief crosses on the front. There is no evidence—as opposed to typological doctrine—to demonstrate that the two faces were carved at different dates.

A possible indication of the chronology of Class II might be based on the fact that, although crosses became very common, the figure of Christ was absent, in contrast to Ruthwell and crosses in Bernicia. Might this be a reflection of the iconoclastic move-

ment in the eastern Christian world, stemming from the Emperor Leo's ban on icons in AD 726? If so, this may mark the earliest possible date for Pictish Class II.

Concentration on typology and chronology tends, however, to distract attention from the intentions and perceptions of those who commissioned, erected and viewed the stones. The cross itself, even without attendant religious scenes and symbols, proclaims a Christian message. In Alcuin's words,

‘This sign [that is, the Cross] will be fully revealed and all good men shall bear it, praising it, as they should, with all their strength’.

(Godman 1985, 141)

In modern terms, we should regard Pictish (and indeed all Insular) crosses not as art objects, but as wayside propagators of the Christian faith, reinforcing conversion, as has been indicated above (7.1).

The sheer impact of these sculptures on the people of Pictland can be roughly quantified for two areas where good land implies a prosperous population. By the end of the 8th century, a traveller along Strathmore from the bend of the river Tay to the Montrose basin—an easy three-day journey of about 40 miles (164km)—might pass through nine settlements, including a major lay or ecclesiastical settlement at Meikle (A Ritchie 1995). At each of these was one or more sculptured crosses, amounting in total to not less than 20 cross-slabs and stele of very varied size, iconography and quality.

A second group of outstanding Class II stones was erected in the area of good land which stretches along the coast of east Ross from Tarbat Ness to Nigg. Within a one-day journey of a mere 11 miles (18km) there are three major crosses at Hilton of Cadboll (sadly mutilated), at Nigg and at Shandwick. It is likely that these crosses were raised under the patronage of the major monastery at Portmahomack, which itself has yielded many high quality fragments of both crosses and architectural sculpture (*ECMS*, 1993, 88-95) in particular from Martin Carver's recent excavation campaigns (see interim publications and sculpture catalogue available on line [www.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/staff/sites/tarbat](http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/staff/sites/tarbat)).

### Features of two groups of Pictish cross-slabs

A convenient way to introduce the range of Pictish Class II sculptures is to summarize the characteristics of these two groups, and then to describe in detail three crosses which may represent both the figural and the decorative carvings. The ultimate intention will be to draw out the inner religious meanings which lie behind the carved designs.

We may begin with the dimensions of the stones. In Strathmore the heights fall into three groups: five tall stele between 2.8m (9ft 3in) and 2.03m (6ft 8in); five small slabs between 0.83m (2ft 9in) and 0.58m (1ft 11in); and a small group of intermediate size. One of the Ross stones, that at Shandwick, topped the Strathmore group at 3.02m (9ft 11in).

Figural carvings may be classed either as secular or religious. Among the ostensibly secular, the leading subject is that of groups of riders, especially in the pursuit of deer with the aid of hounds. On foot, solitary bowmen aim crossbows at deer or boar. There are occasional hand-to-hand conflicts, and one large, highly organized battle scene.

Centaurs (and other imaginary beasts) may be placed in the secular category. Amazingly, there are two Eastern imports on a stone at Meigle: a camel, and the Persian god, Ahura Mazda.

The religious subjects, with one exception, are confined to the Old Testament, in striking contrast with Ruthwell and Bewcastle. David was popular, accompanied with a lamb and a lion, and a harp appropriate to the supposed composer of the Psalms. Daniel in the den of lions, Jonah and the great fish or sea-monster, and Samson or Cain, also appear. In addition to these Old Testament figures, the Desert Fathers, Paul and Anthony, were popular, occurring three (or possibly four) times. Finally we may include several angels. (For a fuller catalogue of figural subjects, not wholly out of date, *ECMS*, Part II, 405ff).

Apart from the figural subjects, there is a wide repertory of motifs which at first glance may appear to be purely decorative, and in some cases this may be so. These motifs are largely confined to the cross-face, where they may appear on the cross-head itself, on the shaft of the cross, and on the fields to either side of the shaft. Rather rarely they may also occur on the narrow sides of the cross.

Among these motifs there are rather stiff abstract step and fret patterns, but on the whole the impression is one of energy and fluidity. This is particularly noticeable in the frequent continuous running interlace, which often forms linked circles. Sometimes the circles surround prominent bosses, which themselves are covered in interlinked strands. Most of the motifs can be traced back to fine metalwork. The most obvious instances of this comprise linked peltaic scrolls which were frequent on the hanging-bowls (19.1.2 illus 122-3 above). Attenuated beasts may also form S-scrolls. Moreover, some of the Pictish symbols which continued from the Class I phase, especially the double-disc and the crescent, are now richly decorated.

Behind the decorative aspect of these motifs, there frequently lies a deep symbolism. Groups of four circles may form a 'hidden' cross, either of Greek form (+) or the saltire (X) from the Greek *Chi*, initial letter of *Christos*. The running vine is a symbol of Christ, who had declared 'I am the true vine' (John, 15:1). More importantly, birds and beasts are frequently seen feeding on the grapes, thus symbolizing the Eucharist, the central sacrament of the Christian church.

Rather more difficult to explain are the snakes (or serpents) which inhabit the circular bosses and the fields between them. Since a serpent brought about the Fall of Man (Genesis, 3), they may be thought to symbolize evil. Alternatively, because the snake sloughs off its dead skin and then appears to be newly born, it may signify the Resurrection itself (Henry 1974, 208). The form of the cross itself has been discussed in Chapter 21, and requires no further discussion here.

From the wide-ranging, but summary, account of figural subjects and patterns on the Pictish Class II stones, it is appropriate to describe in detail three cross-steles, Aberlemno No 3, Meigle No 2, and Nigg, in order to show how the motifs might be combined to compose significant religious messages. It may seem invidious to select so few out of some 60 examples—indeed, experts might well dispute over the selection—but it cannot be disputed that those presented here would certainly fall within the top 10% in terms of quality.

We begin with Aberlemno No 3 (roadside), Angus (illus 162). Its height of 2.82m (9ft



162  
Aberlemno no 3  
(roadside) cross  
side: ringed cross  
with weeping  
angels (*Historic  
Scotland*).

3in) compels the viewer to look up to the cross-head. The arms of the cross bear oblong raised panels, reminiscent of the jewelled settings of a processional cross (illus 162). There is a large boss at the centre of the ring, and circular bosses between the arms, all with snake-spiral decoration. The ring itself has a pattern of running interlace, while the stem of the cross also bears rich (but now heavily weathered) interlace: all reminiscent of metalwork. But the most impressive feature of the cross-face is that at half height there is an angel either side of the cross-stem. They hold books, and their heads are bowed in reverential awe. The Christ-figure is never present on Pictish Class II stones; but the Aberlemno angels compel the viewer to imagine the presence of the crucified Christ.

Other figural and decorative panels fill the rest of the cross-face, but they are all too weathered to allow of interpretation. Fortunately the rear face is well preserved, and presents a rich programme in three panels. At the top are motifs derived from the Class I stones, namely the crescent and V-rod and the double disc with Z-rod. These are richly decorated with interlocked spirals, interlace and fret patterns.

The middle panel, 1.02m (3ft 4in) wide and rather taller, has a lively hunting scene (illus 181 below), with four horsemen, two trumpeters, a probable beater with a shield, and three dogs, all in pursuit of two hinds and a fawn. Such a vivid tableau would have stirred the pulse of a Pictish noble, who may indeed have commissioned and paid for the

erection of the cross. We must bear in mind, however, the many-stranded Christian significance of hunting, and of the deer-hunt in particular discussed above (in particular the Prologue and 18.2.1; Alcock 1998).

The bottom panel had a small sub-panel, with David rescuing one of his father's lambs from the mouth of a lion, and further signified by his harp. To the left is a rather larger panel with a centaur, armed with a woodman's axe and a very stylized tree branch. Given the relative popularity of the Desert Fathers among the Picts, this may recall the centaur who guided Anthony in the desert when he first visited Paul's retreat (for an alternative interpretation of centaurs, *ECMS*, 298; Stevenson 1993, 24.)

Meikle No 2 (illus 163) is an imposing cross-stele, 2.46m (8ft 1in) in height. Its form strongly emphasizes the concept of the wreathed cross, symbol of Christ's victory over the grave, because the ringed cross is almost detached from the stem itself. Both the cross and the ring are embellished with small bosses, with a hint of badly weathered snakes. The bosses are reminiscent of the carbuncles of semi-precious stones on a processional cross. Below the cross-head, the stem—and the fields either side of it—are occupied by fantastic beasts of the varieties common on Insular metalwork and manuscript illumination.

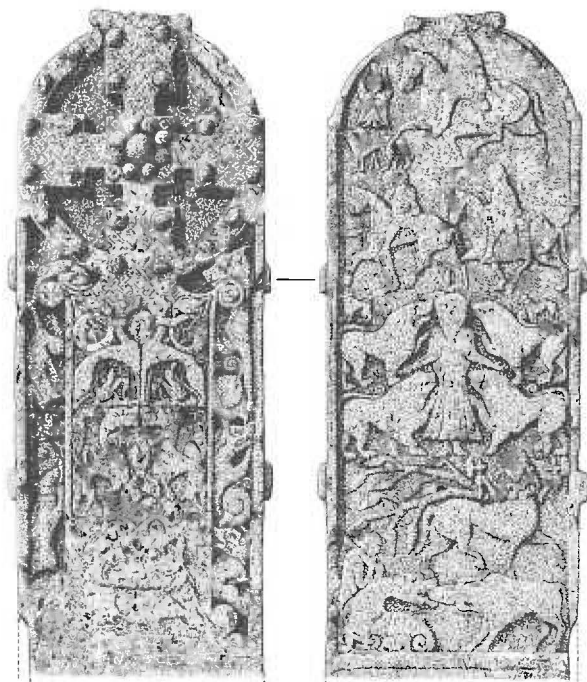
While the ringed cross exemplifies a classical Early Christian symbol of the Resurrection, the other face of Meikle 2 presents a powerful icon on the same theme, but this time derived from the Old Testament. The whole face can be divided into three zones. The

uppermost is occupied by a rather sedate riding and hunting scene, with five riders but only two hounds. The presence of a very diminutive angel suggests that this very secular-looking scene has some religious significance, but this remains obscure to the modern viewer. The bottom zone depicts a large centaur, holding two woodman's axes, plus two leafy branches. Below this is a curious scene of a dragon seizing a bull by the head, while a man with a club stands behind the dragon.

In the middle zone, more or less at eye height, and therefore in a compelling position, stands the prophet Daniel, flanked on both sides by a pair of lions, each raising a paw towards the prophet. Daniel faces forwards, with his forearms raised, probably intended as an *orans* (praying) posture. The scene is evidently that of Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel, 6: 16-23). One theme represented here is that of a hero subduing wild beasts, which had a long ancestry in the Middle East. From as early as the 3rd century AD, it was taken into Christian iconography and in the Migration Period it was eagerly embraced in the Germanic West. Daniel was seen as a just man, persecuted but saved by God, a prototype martyr, but also one who prefigured Christ's resurrection (*Encyclopedia* 219-20; illus 105, 106).

At Nigg (illus 164), the major iconographic interest of the cross-face is focused in a triangular pediment above the actual cross, which is not ringed. The carving on the pediment refers, very tersely, and therefore very movingly, to two incidents in the life and death of the Desert Fathers, Paul and Anthony. The basic story may be told quite briefly, following Jerome's *Life of Paul the First Hermit*, but its symbolic references can only be briefly indicated. Beneath a canopy suggesting date palms, Paul is visited by Antony. For 60 years Paul had been fed by a raven, which daily brought him a half loaf of bread; but in recognition of Antony's visit, it now brings a whole loaf. Thus the first part of Jerome's account. But the bird at Nigg is actually a dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit; and it places a Host, symbolizing the body of Christ, on a flat dish or *paten*. Moreover, the Host clearly has a missing segment on the left side, which recalls the spear wound in Christ's right (that is, facing left) side.

After the breaking of the bread, Paul sends Antony to fetch the cloak which Bishop Athanasius had given him, so that it may be used as a shroud. Antony returns to find Paul already dead. Lacking a spade to dig a grave, he is joined by two lions which dig a grave, and are appropriately blessed by Antony. So the two lions crouching at the feet of Paul and Antony in the Nigg pediment present the second incident in Jerome's account. But symbolically they mirror the beasts at Christ's feet on the Ruthwell cross, which 'acknowledged in the desert the Saviour of the world', just as it had seemed to Antony that 'he saw Christ in Paul' (accessible translation of Jerome: Waddell 1962, 43-51; description of Nigg, I Henderson 1967, 147-9, pl 61; commentary, Meyvaert 1992, espec 134-5).

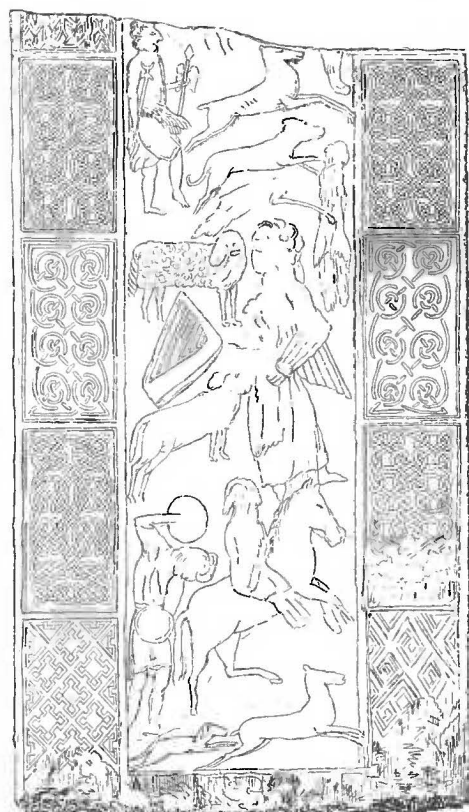
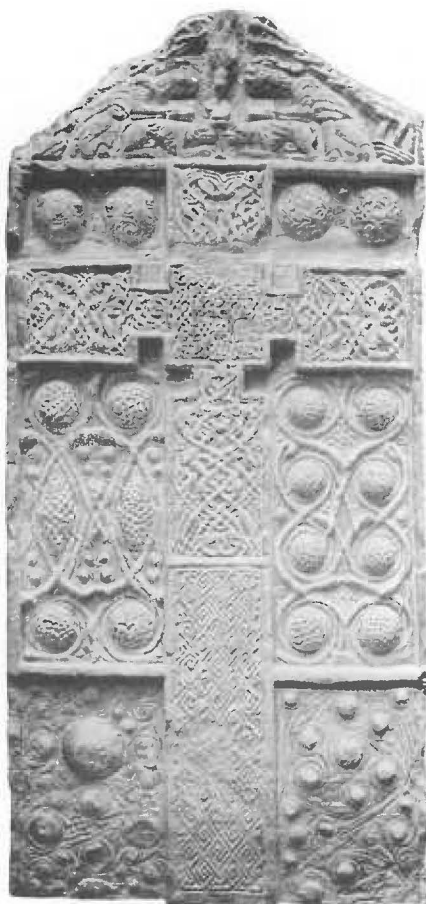


163

Meigle no 2:  
a) ringed cross with  
fantastic animals;  
b) riders; Daniel in  
the lions' den;  
centaur; other  
human and animal  
figures (*Crown  
copyright  
RCAHMS*).

164

The Nigg stone: a) cross face, pediment with Desert Fathers; main face, richly decorated with zoomorphic and abstract designs; b) reverse face, Davidic themes with interlace borders (ECMS).



Below the Desert Fathers pediment, the design of the cross-face has been described as 'a stone version of a cross-carpet page in a gospel book' (Henderson 1987, 56). The cross itself is ringless. Its stem and transom are covered in zoomorphic and pure interlace, while the lower extension of the stem has an overall key-fret design. The greatest richness, however, is displayed in the six panels which form the field or background to the cross itself. In effect, there are six variations on the theme of circular (and, rarely, lentoid) bosses, of varied size and decoration. Large bosses may be surrounded by clusters of smaller ones, or may be surmounted by smaller ones in a design reminiscent of the glass boss from Dundurn (illus 131, 4). Slender tendrils, of ultimate Celtic ancestry, may swirl around the bosses.

In the two major panels, immediately below the transom, these tendrils are seen to end in snakes' heads, and they can be traced back into the interlace which covers the boss. In other words, this is 'not a boss encircled by snakes, but a boss made of snakes—a snake-boss' (I Henderson 1987). On these, we may recall Henry's comment that the snake 'can be a symbol of eternity, or of resurrection, because it sheds its skin and comes out of it alive' (1974, 208).

Hunting of hinds with dogs, on foot and on horseback, form a minor theme on the pictorial face at Nigg. The main theme, however, is Davidic. Centrally, a large man faces a

lamb, a triangular harp, and an under-sized lion. Bottom left is a figure in a dancing attitude, holding a large disc in each hand, recalling that David and the house of Israel celebrated the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem 'with harps, lyres, tambourines and cymbals' (2 Samuel, 6:5); though 'well-tuned cymbals' are also invoked more widely in praising God, for example in Psalm 150. The large panel at Nigg appears to be the major statement of Davidic themes in the whole Pictish *oeuvre*. On other crosses, such as Aldbar, Dupplin or St Andrews, David occupies only one or two panels among other varied themes: indeed, at Aberlemno No 3 we have noted that he is relegated to a footnote at the bottom of the cross. It should be noted that the border around the Nigg scene is formed of oblong panels, decorated with interlace and fret patterns in the manner of the borders to the David figures in the Durham *Cassiodorus* (Bailey 1978); but no direct influence or borrowing should be inferred from this observation.

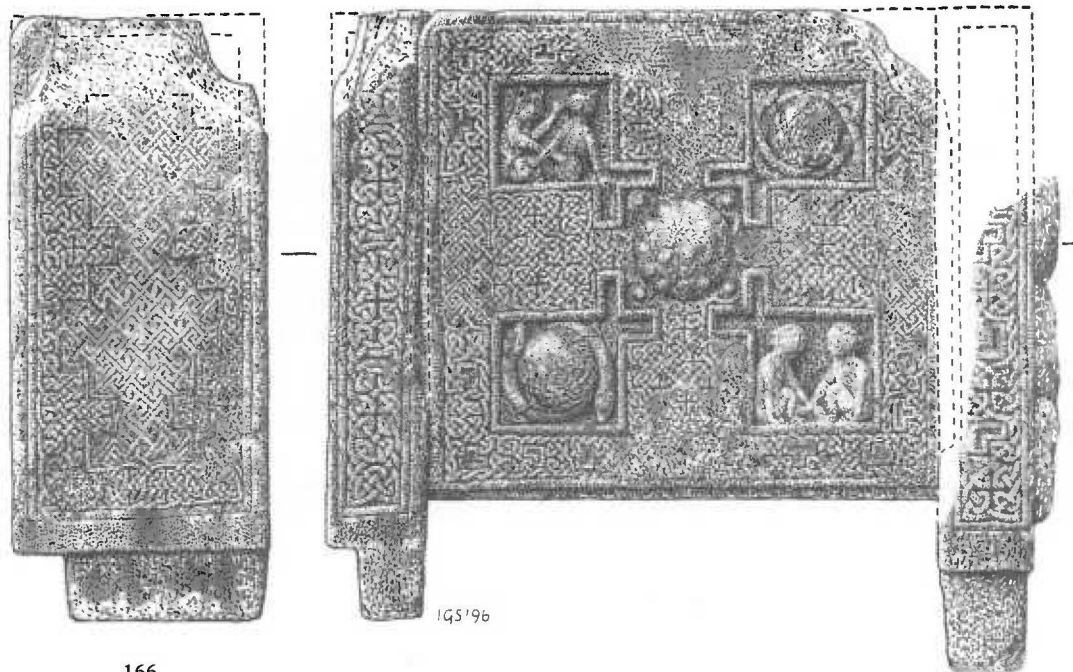
### 22.2.2 St Andrews sarcophagus

The most celebrated of Pictish sculptures is not, in fact, a cross, but the sarcophagus (technically a corner-slab or corner-block shrine), of which major fragments were found at St Andrews in the 19th century (Foster 1998; for the St Andrews context, see 14.2.4). From these, it has been possible to reconstruct a lidded stone box, of overall dimensions 1.77m (5ft 7in) long, 1m (3ft 3in) wide and 1.7m (2ft 3in) high. The principal recovered pieces comprise one long side, one end panel, and parts of three corner slabs, into which the side and end panels had been slotted. The other long side is missing, as is the lid: a particularly unfortunate loss because it has not been possible to reach a scholarly agreement as to whether it was flat, or double-sloped like a house-shrine such as the Monymusk reliquary (19.2.3; illus 133).

All the panels are richly carved, with interlace, both zoomorphic and abstract (including hidden crosses), snake-bosses, and figural scenes. On the extant end panel, the interlace fills the inter-spaces of the arms of a cross and on one of the corner slabs, key-fret creates a double cross, against a background of running interlace.

165  
St Andrews  
sarcophagus: main  
preserved side  
panel and flanking  
panels (Ian G  
Scott).





166  
St Andrews  
sarcophagus: best  
preserved end  
panel and flankers  
(*Ian G Scott*).

The most elaborate figural scenes are those on the existing side panel. The left-hand two-thirds of the field displays animals and men, moving from right to left, and engaged in violent actions: top centre, a mounted king or noble (as denoted by his falcon) is either attacked by a lion, or more probably is actually engaged on a lion hunt; deer are attacked by predators; a mule is brought down by a griffin; a deer-hunter goes on foot, armed with spear and shield.

Despite all this exciting activity, the panel is visually dominated by the person at the right-hand end: a full-height figure, shown to be a man of high status by his dagger in a magnificently decorated scabbard. He is holding the jaws of a lion, and in Old Testament terms he might be identified as Samson (Judges, 14:5-6), an Asiatic and Classical hero of the type of Hercules. But above his left shoulder is a monkey or dog, and, more significantly, above his right shoulder is a sheep. This positively identifies him as David rescuing one of his father's lambs from a lion (I Samuel, 17). Subsequently, the shepherd lad slays the giant Goliath with a slingstone, an appropriate weapon for a Asiatic herdsman. In Judaeo-Christian belief, the importance of David was that he was foreteller of the Messiah, in effect, of Christ. The historic David became king of the Israelites, and this is appropriate for the dagger of the St Andrews sarcophagus. But this is to transform a deeply significant religious statement into one about secular kingship.

Recently, however, Dr Henderson (1998, 108-9, 135-8) has emphasised the royal status of the central mounted figure, as marked by his engagement with a lion, itself king of beasts. This, even more than the image of David, suggests that the sarcophagus held not the body of a saint or bishop, but of a Pictish king (for a fuller exposition of the significance of lions in a Christian context, Metford 1983, 162).

Within the limitations of the present survey it is not possible to pursue further aspects

of the St Andrews iconography (the reader is directed to the study of all aspects of the sarcophagus in Foster (ed) 1998, especially essays by Henderson, 19-35; 97-167). But one comment may be allowed on the character of the carving itself. Because the fragments had been buried rather than exposed to atmospheric weathering, it is possible to see that some of the carving is actually undercut (Welander 1998, 65-70; already noticed by IAG Scott and others in 1996), causing shadows which create the appearance of great depth.

Such undercutting has not been recognized elsewhere among the Picts, and it is extremely rare in Northumbria. But it was quite common in the Mediterranean, especially in marble, and also in ivory. Dr Henderson has sensitively developed this theme (1998, espec 124-6) in relation to Italo-Byzantine models for the sarcophagus. It is perhaps tempting to speculate that some of the Mediterranean inspiration of the St Andrews figures might have come to Pictland on an ivory casket—given the locale, perhaps holding the relics of St Andrew himself (but note Foster's caution here: 1998, 42-3).

In briefest summary: the St Andrews sarcophagus has been well described as 'uniquely grand' (Webster & Brown 1997, 227-9, with fig 100).

### 22.2.3 Pictish stones of Class III

Turning now to the Class III Pictish sculptures: these are generally distinguished by the absence of Pictish symbols. There were also some differences from the 'High Style' of Class II in the treatment of figural themes. In some cases, for instance, the figures—especially in riding and hunting scenes—are unrealistic. In other cases they are stiff and presented frontally. Moreover, in those cases where the characteristic symbols do appear, they are feebly decorated. We shall shortly see some especially well-defined examples in the 'Dupplin-Benvie' group.

These lapses from the 'High Style' have previously been explained as the result of a major political event, which can be precisely dated. The concept of such an event derives from 'a king-list and a set of Gaelic annals [which] were spliced together...shortly before 995, [and which] described the destruction of the Picts' (Cowan 1981, 18). This event, it was believed, had resulted from the usurpation of the Pictish kingship by the Dál Riata king, Kenneth, son of Alpin (discussed above 4.2.4). He, it was claimed, led the Scots out of Argyll into Pictland in the year AD 842. The outcome of this supposed usurpation has traditionally been interpreted somewhat starkly as the immediate suppression of Pictish culture, marked most obviously by the disappearance of the Pictish symbol-system. Even a more moderate appraisal has suggested that there was a gradual waning of the leading characteristics of that culture in the decades after 850 (CL Curle 1940, 105). This simplified account does an injustice to more subtle scholarly discussions (see I Henderson 1978, 47-9); it does, however, fairly represent a common perception.

#### The Dupplin Cross

The chronological dependence on the activities of Kenneth has now been decisively refuted by the discovery of a panel with a Latin inscription on the Dupplin cross (illus 167: Forsyth 1995). The panel itself is in a prime position, at the top of one of the two main faces, immediately below the cross-head. The inscription is badly weathered, but the two top lines can be read as CUSTANTIN FILIUS FIRICUS, Constantine, son of Fergus. It may reasonably be conjectured that this would have continued with the words



167  
Dupplin Cross: a)  
top panel, largely  
eroded inscription;  
centre panel, pairs  
of birds around  
interlace; bottom  
panel, David  
rescuing a lamb  
from a lion and a  
bear (*National  
Museums of  
Scotland*).

‘erected this cross...’. (Less probably, it may have been a statement that one of Constantine’s successors had erected the stone in his honour.)

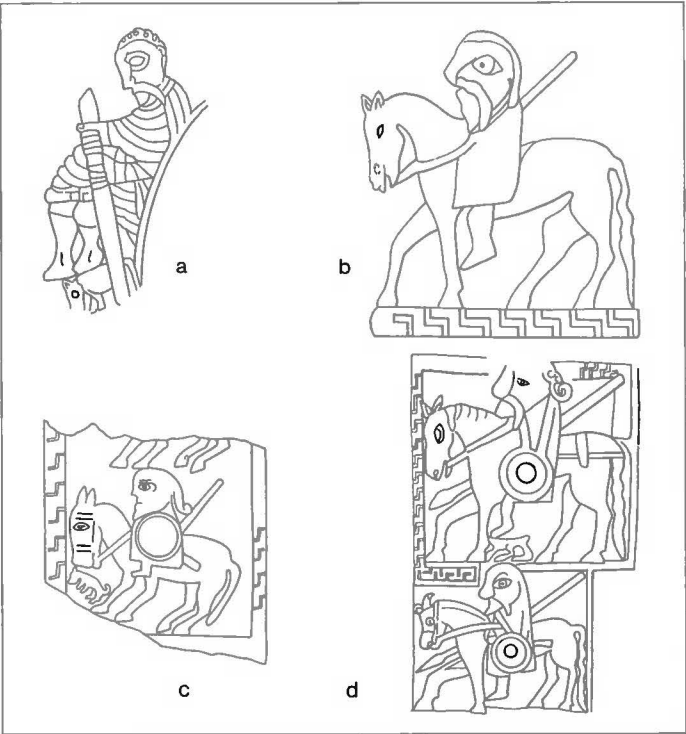
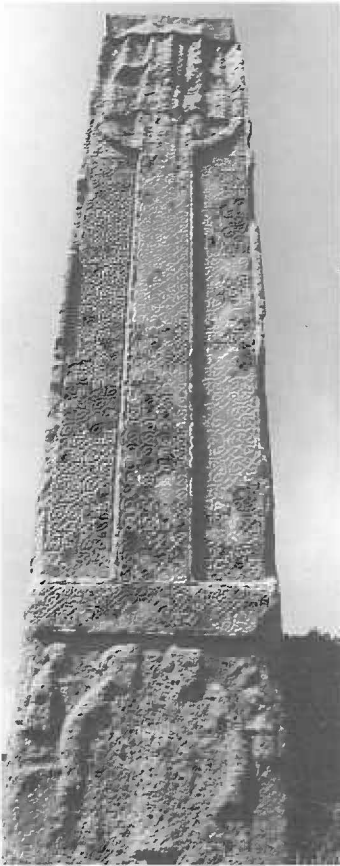
Constantine was one of three kings who had held the kingship of both the Picts and the Scots before Kenneth son of Alpin. He assumed the Pictish kingship in AD 789, and that of Dál Riata in 811. He died in 820 (*BD*, 90). The implication in terms of the chronology of Pictish sculpture is that the Dupplin cross was most probably erected before AD 820; or, if it was erected to celebrate Constantine, then very shortly after that date. In other words, a major Class III carving can be placed in the second or third decade of the 9th century. This is the most precise date in the whole Pictish *oeuvre*.

The Dupplin cross owes very little to the Pictish ‘High Style’. For a start, the type of monument, not a stele or a slab, but a free-standing cross, was quite revolutionary in north-eastern Scotland. It is true that such crosses were being raised in Bernicia at about that time; and some of them, such as that at Rothbury (Cramp 1984a, 217-8 with pls 211-12), can be shown to have had the distinctive double-curved form of the four arms of the cross which is seen at Dupplin. More relevant as an inspiration, however, was the original St John’s cross on Iona, before it was repaired with curving struts to create a ring-headed cross (RCAHMS 1983, 17-19; 197-204). The importance of this is firstly, that St John’s cross is dated to the

middle or late 8th century; and secondly that some influence from Dál Riata, and specifically from Iona, would be consistent with the evidence for political interplay between Picts and Scots in the late 8th and earlier 9th century. However that might be, with the deep curves of the cross itself, and the tall cope above it, Dupplin outshines both the Ionan and Northumbrian examples.

Much of the ornamental detail of peltaic scrolls and small panels of interlace and keyfret are indeed within the Pictish tradition (though similar interlace panels can also be seen at Rothbury: Cramp 1984a, pl 211). The two David panels would also have been greatly to Pictish taste (I Henderson 1986). Together with the three panels of martial display, they may be seen as statements about the divine and military status of kings. Their profound religious significance cannot be overlooked, however. At the simplest, the harpist panel represents David as composer of the Psalms. Moreover, he was regarded as the foreteller of Christ, while the rescue of lambs from lions and bears was itself a symbol of salvation (above) (Alcock 1995). In the central panel, four pairs of unspecific birds peck at a circle which contains a hidden cross within the interlace: the birds here represent winged souls. Presumably the scrolls ending in triple leaves, but lacking grapes, should be regarded as vine-scrolls, with all the religious significance which that implied. Northumbrian influence may be deduced here (Henderson 1978, 57).

The Dupplin cross is also the prime example of a distinct school of sculptors in southern Perthshire, the Dupplin-Benvie group (illus 168). This specialized in stationary horses, in contrast to the vigorous animals of the 'High Style'. The Dupplin king has a large drooping moustache, and so have a pair of riders at Benvie (*ECMS*, fig 260). On the Forteviot arch, in the valley below the Dupplin cross, the king has a similar moustache and also curly hair like the senior of the two Benvie riders. At Kirriemuir (No 3) is a similar rider, this time without a moustache (*ECMS*, fig 269). Apart from the figures, there are close parallels in the ornament, both zoomorphic and pure interlace. This little group, united in style, is spread over a distance of 18 miles by 15 miles (30km by 25km). It represents a final flash of artistic inspiration and innovation, albeit



stilted and mannered, in Pictland before the middle of the 9th century.

### Sueno's Stone

The outstanding example, however, of a Pictish cross-stele is the so-called Sueno's Stone (illus 169; col illus I.3). It is a sorry reflection on the curious mentality which underlies conventional Pictish studies that the cross-face is very rarely illustrated or discussed. Instead, attention has been concentrated on the mythic pseudo-history, going back to the 16th century, and on the pictorial face with its enigmatic battle- and decapitation-scenes, which are incomprehensible in rational military terms (above, 12.2; illus 52).

The cross-face itself has an apparently simple iconography. The visible face of the stele rises to about 6.10m (20ft), tapering slightly from a maximum width of 1.14m (3ft 9in). At about 4.56m (15ft) above the ground is the centre of a ringed cross which occupies the full width of the stone. This height, about three times human eye-height, impels the viewer to gaze up in awe. The stem and foot of

168  
The Benvie-Dupplin style for men and riders:  
a) Forteviot arch;  
b) the Dupplin cross;  
c) Kirriemuir;  
d) Benvie.

169  
Sueno's Stone: the cross side (*Historic Scotland*).

the cross itself, and the fields either side are filled with patterns of fine interlace.

Below the foot of the cross is a square panel with figures (illus 171a here; see also Sellar 1993, figs 6.1 & 6.6). Centrally there is a badly eroded figure, of which only the feet and lower tunic are clear, though there may be a suggestion of slightly spread arms and a head. Either side is one tall and one much shorter figure; these are much less badly eroded. The extreme erosion of the central figure can best be explained by devout pilgrims touching—and indeed kissing—that image. This in turn strongly suggests that the figure was that of Christ himself, thus ruling out Sellar's interpretation in terms of the enthronement of a secular king. It must be admitted that there is no ready identification of the flanking figures. The Nativity, Baptism, or Arrest of Christ have all been suggested. If, however, the erosion of the central figure is accepted as evidence of the adoration of pilgrims, then we have here one of the most precious icons in Late Pictish sculpture.

#### 22.2.4 West-coast crosses: the Iona group

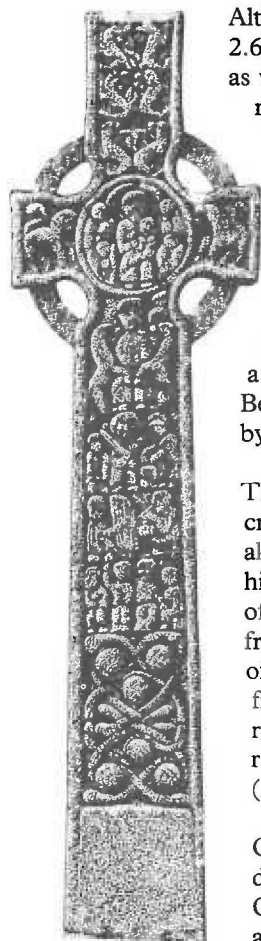
Finally in this brief survey we must consider a small but outstanding sample of free-standing crosses erected in the *paruchia*, or sphere of influence, of Columban Iona (general account in RCAHMS 1982, 17-9; 192-211). The simplest of these, respectively at Kilnave on Islay and Keills towards the root of the Kintyre peninsula, are characterized by carving on one face only, and by their very stumpy arms. The Kilnave cross is decorated chiefly with panels of peltaic scrolls of ultimate hanging-bowl derivation, and also two lesser areas of key fret. The most interesting element of the ornament is a circle filling the area of the crossing of shaft and transom, which recalls the shallow relief circles in this position on Pictish stele, and anticipates the bosses in this position on Iona and elsewhere. The circle contains three interlinked peltas—an obvious reference to the Trinity (RCAHMS 1984, 220-2).

The Keills cross also uses key and curvilinear patterns, but now the circle at the crossing is replaced by a prominent boss with a central hollow containing three smaller bosses: the obviously named 'bird's nest' boss, a stone version of an ornament also found on brooches and other metalwork. There is also some zoomorphic ornament; but the main theme, below and around the boss, is Daniel harassed by four ferocious lions. Above the boss is a winged figure standing on a serpent or dragon, which has been identified as St Michael, a very rare icon (RCAHMS 1992, 86-7).

The third free-standing cross of the Iona group outside that island is at Kildalton on Islay (illus 170).

170  
Kildalton cross.  
Ringed cross with  
interlace on the  
ring itself; on the  
head, figures from  
both Old and New  
Testaments  
(Crown copyright  
RCAHMS).





Although neither the most elegant of the group, nor the tallest at 2.65m (8ft 8in), it has an impressive appearance of permanence, as well as a rich iconographic programme. The overall form is a ringed cross, with key and interlace patterns on the ring. On the east face, the iconography of the two sides of the transom is balanced: to the left the murderous Cain foretells the Crucifixion, while his brother Abel represents a sacrifice acceptable to God, while on the right, Abraham's offer of the sacrifice of his son Isaac has references to the Jewish Pascal Lamb and also to the Crucifixion. Above the central boss, in order from the top down, are: two angels; David rescuing a lamb from a lion; and two peacocks (?) pecking at a bunch of grapes (?), a Mediterranean image of the Eucharist. Below the ring, the Virgin, with the Child on her lap, is flanked by two angels.

The west face presents us with an iconographic problem. On the cross-arms around the central boss are four very vigorous lions, akin to those at Keills—but there is no Daniel. Are we to accept his implied presence, or should we turn to others of the numerous, often conflicting, significances attributed to the lion? These range from the equating of Christ, as ruler of the world, with the king of beasts, to the devil as a roaring lion (Metford 1983, 162). Apart from the overtly religious icons, both faces are very richly decorated with long-established curvilinear motifs as well as the more recently developed snake and other forms of boss (RCAHMS 1984, 206-12).

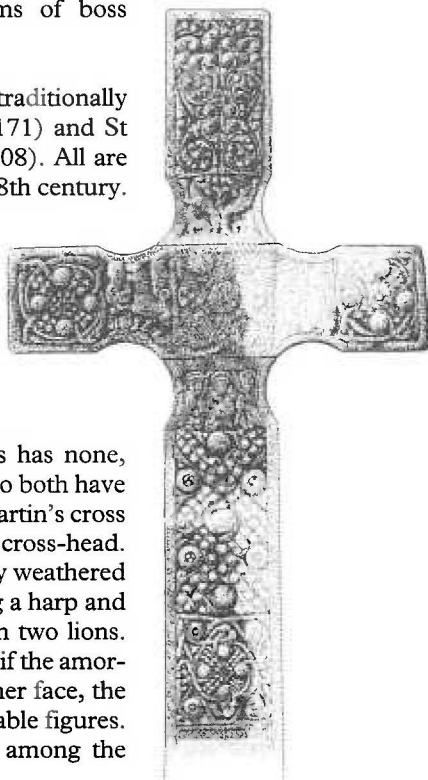
On Iona itself, there are three major crosses, traditionally designated as St John's, St Martin's (illus 171) and St Oran's (illus 172) (RCAHMS 1982, 192-208). All are assigned to the middle or second half of the 8th century.

There is, however, considerable diversity between them. In terms of the basic cross form, St Oran's, which is fragmentary, has a moderately wide transom and no ring; St Martin's, carved from a single block, stands 4.3m (14ft 1in) high, and has a stubby transom and a slender ring; St John's, 5.3m (17ft 5in) high, was carved originally as ringless, but was repaired after a fall with rounded stone struts which describe a perfect curve.

There is also considerable variety in their iconography. St John's has none, though some non-figural symbolism may be detected. The other two both have a Virgin with the Child on her lap, accompanied by angels. On St Martin's cross this icon occupies the major position, in a circle at the centre of the cross-head. On the same side, above a panel of snake-bosses, there are four very weathered panels. The lowest is indecipherable, but above it are David playing a harp and accompanied by a piper; Abraham's sacrifice; and Daniel between two lions. On St Oran's cross there is a possible scene of David, lion and lamb, if the amorphous object above the lion's back is indeed a lamb; and on the other face, the transom has David with his harp and two weathered and unidentifiable figures. As we have already seen at Kildalton—and most conspicuously among the

171  
Iona, St Martin's cross: ringed cross with Mary and Child as focus of the cross-head (Crown copyright RCAHMS).

172  
Iona, St Oran's cross. A ring-less cross; one side largely obliterated; Mary and Child as focus just below transom (Crown copyright RCAHMS).



Picts—the emphasis is heavily upon the Old Testament. There is also a noticeable absence of the Desert Fathers or other desert motifs, the more remarkable when we consider the setting of the monastery of Iona.

The ornament on the Iona crosses is a rich mixture, as at Kildalton, of traditional Celtic scrolls and bosses of various sizes, frequently linked together by snakes. The symbolic reference of these to the Resurrection has already been emphasized. There are also examples of 'hidden' crosses. For instance, there are saltires on the main panel of the shaft of St Oran's, while bosses and peltae make Greek crosses on the rear face. On the west face of St John's there are both saltires and an upright cross. On the transom, two very heraldic lions flourishing their tails must surely have a protective role towards the Virgin and Child.

173

St Cuthbert's  
wooden coffin.

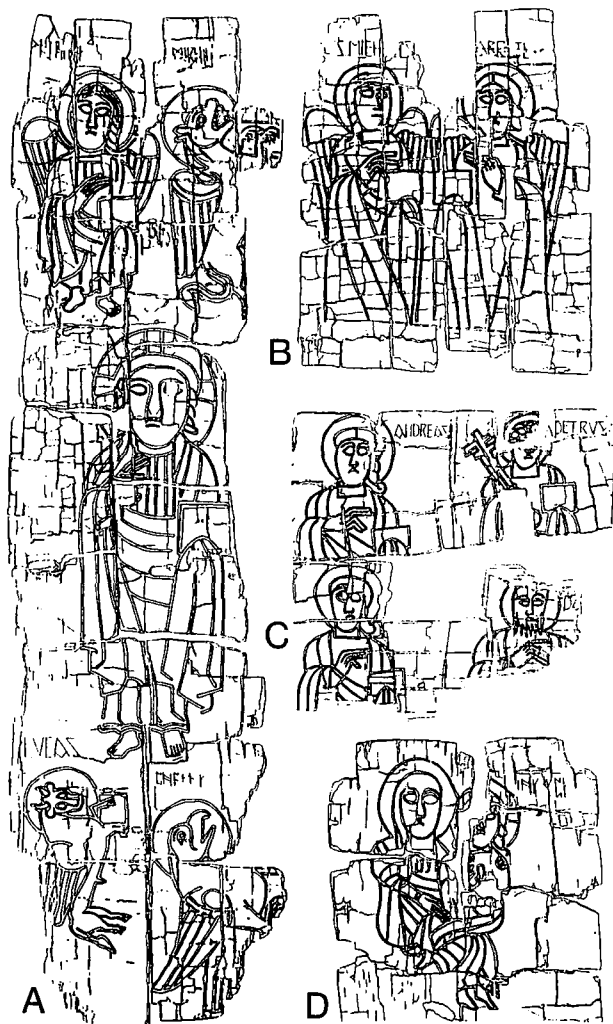
Principal icons: A,  
Christ with evan-  
gelists' symbols; B,  
archangels Michael  
& Gabriel; C, St  
Peter with keys, St  
Paul bearded; D,  
Mary and Child.

## 22.3 CARVING IN WOOD AND BONE

Inevitably, the bulk of our evidence for sculpture is in stone, a relatively imperishable material, however much individual monuments have suffered from both deliberate and thoughtless destruction. In contrast, organic materials, chiefly wood, and bone or ivory, have survived only rarely. As it happens, however, from Bernicia come two outstanding examples: the wooden coffin of St Cuthbert, and the so-called Franks Casket in whale bone.

### 22.3.1 St Cuthbert's coffin

Cuthbert died in his hermitage on Inner Farne in AD 687, and was buried in the church on Lindisfarne. In 698 his body was exhumed and was considered to be incorrupt. It was therefore placed in a light chest or coffin, which stood on the floor of the sanctuary in that church, where it became an object of cult and pilgrimage (*VCB*, 42). Subsequently it was moved, first to Chester-le-Street, and ultimately to Durham cathedral. After further vicissitudes, the tomb was reopened in 1899, and sufficient fragments were recovered to allow the light coffin of 698 to be reconstructed. For the student of Insular art and iconography it has the supreme importance of being the only closely dated object of the period (above 19.2.3; further details in Battiscombe 1956b; Kitinger 1956; Cronyn & Horie 1985; useful summary, O'Sullivan & Young 1995, 58-66).

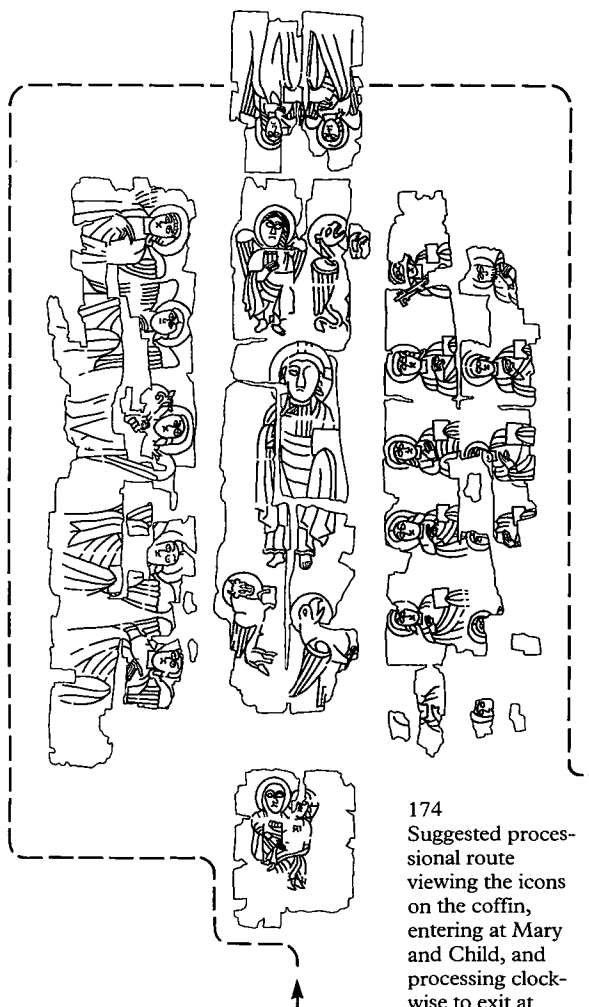


The original coffin (illus 173) was a box of oblong cross section, about 1.68m (5ft 6in) long, tapering slightly from a maximum of 0.46m (1ft 6in) high by 0.38m (1ft 3in) wide, made out of six oak planks. The top, and all four sides, bear linear engravings. At the foot (narrow) end, is a seated Virgin with the Child on her knee. Raising their eyes from this, pilgrims would see on the lid a large standing Christ, with four evangelist symbols, each labelled in runic or Roman script: an ox for Luke and an eagle for John at Christ's feet, with a man for Matthew and a lion for Mark beyond his head. Each creature is winged, and each carries a book, thus 'impersonating' the respective evangelist. The pilgrim, processing to the left, would then pass five named angels on the left side of the coffin; the archangels Michael and Gabriel on the end panel; and then a double row of apostles down the right-hand side.

Since the angels and apostles are all named, it can be seen that the apostles are arranged from right to left in the order of the canon of the Roman Mass: that is, on the right with Peter displaying the Key to the Kingdom, and a bearded Paul. This liturgical or processional layout argues very strongly that originally the coffin was not normally veiled, but was uncovered, if not permanently, then at least on appropriate religious processions (illus 174).

Analysis of the actual engraved lines suggests that the carving was done by two or more persons. They appear to have been following, perhaps at several removes, Mediterranean models, chiefly from Western Christendom. The simple technique of the engraving does not, however, allow firm or detailed conclusions to be drawn about the sources (Kitzinger 1956). But it is not unreasonable to comment here that Cuthbert's coffin was created originally as a work of piety and an object of veneration and pilgrimage, not as an art object.

None the less, the simplicity, even crudity of the engraving does raise an important question in terms of Northumbrian skills in wood-carving. In a royal context, Hope-Taylor has argued very reasonably (1977, 316-7) that the wide doorposts at Yeavering provided a 'generously broad field for decorative enrichment', and contemplated 'the local development of decorative wood-carving'. More recently, visual expression has been given to Hope-Taylor's ideas in a reconstruction picture of Edwin's hall at Yeavering (P Dunn in Welch 1992, col pl 1). However, our actual knowledge of Bernician wood-carving, as expressed in Cuthbert's coffin, gives little encouragement to such reconstructions.

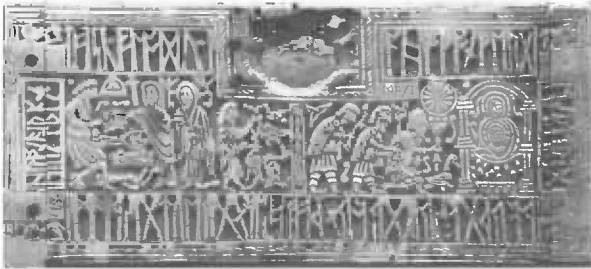
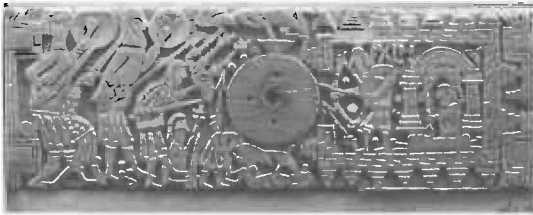


174  
Suggested processional route viewing the icons on the coffin, entering at Mary and Child, and processing clockwise to exit at bottom right corner.

### 22.3.2 The Franks casket

175  
Panels from the  
Franks Casket:  
top, an attack on  
Egil's fortified  
homestead; middle,  
left, Wayland the  
Smith, right, Magi  
visiting Mary and  
Child; bottom, sack  
of Jerusalem  
(*British Museum*).

The Franks Casket, by contrast, is a richly carved miniature (illus 175). Its form is a rectangular box, 0.23m (9in) long, 0.19m (7.5in) wide and 0.13m (5in) high, originally with a lock on the front face and a large circular knob, possibly of precious metal, on the lid. It was carved out of bone from a stranded whale, as one of its runic inscriptions implies. The carving is in false relief—that is to say, the background has been lowered to produce the figural scenes and inscriptions. Given the material, extraordinarily fine detail has been achieved, for instance, a cabled border about 5mm (0.2in) wide, and weapon shafts about 2.5mm (0.1in) thick. In general, the carver's skills have created scenes of vigorous action and great narrative interest (brief account, Wilson 1984, 85–6, with illus 34–7 & 96; major discussion, Webster 1982).



The narrative themes fall into three groups: Germanic legends, such as that of Wayland the smith; Roman legend and history, represented by Romulus and Remus, and the sack of Jerusalem by the general Titus; and the New Testament account of the adoration of the Magi. Some of these topics may have been derived from an illustrated universal history, but the Germanic elements at least are likely to have come from an independent source.

There are also strong Late Antique influences, not least in the form of the casket itself, which may have been modelled on a Mediterranean reliquary-casket in ivory. In some support of the idea of such inspiration, the sack of Jerusalem is depicted in an upper and lower register, but with a central element spanning the two: a layout found on both reliquary-caskets and sarcophagi. Appropriate models could have been brought to Northumbria by those who had visited Gaul or Rome such as Wilfrid, Benedict Biscop or Ceolfrith.

But whatever the strength of Mediterranean Christian influences, Webster's penetrating analysis (1982) has also revealed the importance of Insular, and specifically Northumbrian elements. Obviously these would include the

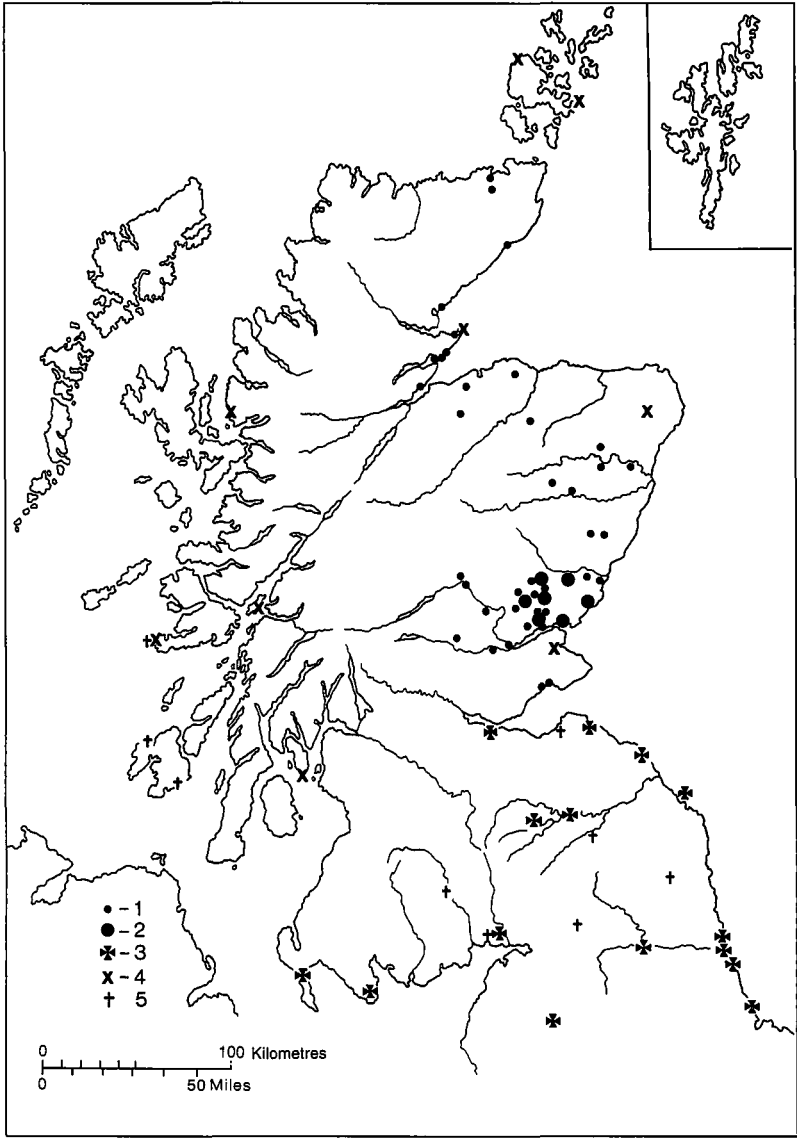
runic inscriptions, and very probably, on epigraphic grounds, the Latin inscription which labels the flight from Jerusalem. Parallels from Germanic metalwork may be cited in the self-biting beasts which adorn the corners of the front panel, and in the guardian eagles whose beaks protect the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem as well as Egil's wife in his fortified enclosure.



As should be clear from this summary account, despite its small size the Casket displays scenes of lively action and great variety. In addition, its catholic and eclectic narrative

sources imply that it was commissioned and created in a place, and at a time, when such sources were available to both secular and religious patrons. Webster rightly argues for Northumbria (and perhaps might have narrowed this to Bernicia) in the late 7th century and early decades of the 8th, under the patronage of the monasteries at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth and their distinguished abbots.

Fascinating as it is in itself, the Franks Casket is also a precious reminder of all the riches of minor carved objects which have been lost to us—to say nothing of the treasures, whether secular or religious, which such caskets had contained.



176  
Map of ecclesiastical monuments, principally late 7th to early 9th centuries:  
1, Pictish Class II stones, single;  
2, Class II, two or more stones;  
3, monasteries in Greater Bernicia;  
4, selected 'Celtic' monasteries;  
5, free-standing crosses. Sources: RCAHMS 1994b; OS Britain in the Dark Ages, 1996.

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## THE PLEASURES OF THE HALL & THE FIELD

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### 23.1 THE HALL

#### 23.1.1 Feasting and drinking

‘Knife has gone into meat, and drink into horn,  
and a thronging in the hall’

Jones & Jones 1949, 97

This splendid phrase from the 11th-century Welsh tale *Culhwch and Olwen* would seem to set the agenda and the tone for an account of the pleasures of a medieval hall. Certainly the pleasure of drinking can be fully substantiated from both the literary and the artefactual evidence. For evidence of this, we may begin with the heroic poetry, and especially the Gododdin poem. Composed as it was in a kingdom based on Edinburgh, and extending over south-east Scotland and north-east England, it has relevance to the customs of the Britons in general. A recent discussion of the date of the original oral composition would put it around the middle of the 6th century, or at any rate within that century, rather than into the early 7th (Dumville 1988; but see now Koch 1997). We might have reservations about the historicity of the military expedition which the poem celebrates (above 10.5); but there can be no doubt that it presents a poet’s view of the attitudes and aspirations of contemporary warrior-society (Charles-Edwards 1978).

The Gododdin warriors drank both wine and mead. Indeed, given the number of individual references in the poem, the latter appears the more common: but this may be because of its symbolic significance for the bard. Of particular interest are the references to the wine- and mead-feasts (*gwinfaeth*, *meddfaeth*) which created a bond of obligation between the king and his war-band. There are also phrases referring to individual warriors, who are described as ‘wine-fed’ or ‘nurtured on wine’: eg stanza 64 (Jarman 1988, 42/43):

Gwaednerth son of Llywri had been reared on wine.

Among the Angles, as represented in the *Beowulf* poem, ale and mead were the normal drink to accompany a feast. The social—as well as festive—aspects of this are revealed by Beowulf’s account of events in the hall of Hrothgar: ‘the illustrious queen...went up and down the hall, pressed the young men to feast...Before the noblest retainers, Hrothgar’s daughter bore the ale cup to the warriors (*Beowulf*, ll, 2016–2021). On another occasion, however, at ‘the finest of banquets, men drank wine’ (*ibid*, 1232–3). Here and elsewhere the substance of the feast or the banquet is left unstated, as indeed was the case among the Gododdin. We have no comparable evidence from the Picts or the Irish/Scots of Dál Riata; but in the latter case at least we might use Irish heroic poetry as a surrogate. Thus, when the men of Ulster were drinking in the house of a famed story teller, ‘meat and drink were passed round’ (Kinsella 1969, 8).

As the poetry makes clear, there was a payment to be made for the pleasures of feasting and drinking in the hall. Thus Wiglaf, at the time of Beowulf's fatal battle with the dragon, attempts to rally the support of his companions by reminding them how, when they drank mead in the beer-hall, 'we pledged ourselves to our lord...that we would repay him for the war-equipment...if any need like this befell him' (Wrenn 1950, ll 2631 ff). Here the mead-feast creates the occasion, while the lord's gifts create the obligation. For the Gododdin warriors, however, it is the mead-feast itself which creates the obligation to serve the lord loyally, even—or, in the poem itself, normally—unto death (Jackson 1969, 35-6).

### Drinking vessels

We may now consider the archaeological evidence for the wine feast. Fragments of imported pottery wine-jars and glass drinking-vessels occur on 'potentate' or 'elite' defended or enclosed sites in western (especially south-western) Britain and also in Ireland; indeed it is such finds which are considered to justify social classifications such as 'potentate'. Details of the trade have already been outlined (8.1 above). At this point it is sufficient to recall that two different sources can be distinguished. The earlier, in the later 5th and earlier 6th centuries, was in the Mediterranean, especially its eastern half. Sometimes the wine-amphorae were accompanied by fine tableware in a Roman tradition.

By the later 6th century—and more definitely in the 7th—the Mediterranean sources were replaced by an east Gaulish one, probably centred on Bordeaux. It seems that the typical Mediterranean pottery amphorae gave way to wooden barrels, which normally leave no archaeological trace. Fortunately, however, the casks had been accompanied by small quantities of a distinctive grey tableware from Bordeaux. There was also a varied collection of flagons, beakers, cooking-pots and porringers in a very hard fabric, sherds of which have survived in quantity on sites in Ireland and western—especially north-western—Britain. These vessels came from Gaul in the 7th century, and probably on into the 8th.

Glass vessels—in the form of jars, bowls, and, most commonly, drinking-beakers—were also imported into northern Britain, either directly from western and northern Gaul, or by way of Anglo-Saxon England. In some areas of England, especially the south-east, glass-ware was quite common. Some of the examples found in western and northern Britain may actually have been made in England; and there is some slight evidence that glass was even being made in northern Britain, especially at Whithorn.

We may now cite the literary and archaeological evidence for the kind of vessels that were used to drink wine and mead. The warriors of the Gododdin drank from horns; from cups which are not otherwise described; and also from glass vessels. Bleiddig son of Eli 'drank the wine of brimming glass vessels'; and Tafloywy 'with a flourish would toss off a glass of mead' (Jarman 1988, 58, l 883; 52, l 776). There are also hints of vessels of precious metals: Gwaednerth is said to have had 'silver around his mead, gold was his due' (Jarman 1988, 42, l 626), apparently meaning that the mead was in a silver vessel (Jackson 1969, 142 translates 'silver [goblets]'). It may, however, imply no more than a silver rim-binding to a vessel of some organic substance—leather, wood, or horn.

Curiously enough, despite these references to glass vessels in the Gododdin poem, they are at present unknown from sites in Gododdin territory. Among the Picts, rare sherds

of vessel glass are known from the forts of Dundurn (Alcock *et al* 1989) and Clatchard Craig (Close-Brooks 1986); it seems likely that these had reached the east along river routes from the west coast.

Certainly glass sherds of Early Historic date are well known among the western neighbours of the Gododdin, both Britons and Irish-Scots. Among the Britons we may cite *Alt Clut* (Dumbarton) (Hunter 1990b), Buiston crannog (Crone 1999), Castlehill Dalry (Smith 1919), Mote of Mark (Curle 1914) and Whithorn (Hill 1997). Relevant forts in Dál Riata are Dunadd (RCAHMS 1988, 149–59) and Dunollie (Alcock & Alcock 1987).

As we have seen, in addition to glass, cups and mead-horns are referred to in *Y Gododdin*. These are likely to have been of wood, leather or horn, and consequently would only be recovered under rare conditions that favour the preservation of organic materials. Such conditions have not so far occurred on a relevant site in northern Britain, so direct evidence is lacking.

However, such cups and horns are likely to have had rim-mounts of bronze or even of precious metals, in the form of shallow U-shaped strips round the rim, held in place by deeper U-clamps, which in turn are fastened by studs or rivets passing right through the wall of the vessel. These are known, on complete, or near-complete vessels, in Anglo-Saxon contexts (recent review, East 1983). In a British/Celtic context, such bindings, clamps and mounts are well represented at Dinas Powys, in sizes appropriate to cups, horns, and small buckets (Alcock 1963, 110–2; 1987a, 99–104); but it must be admitted that this is a wholly untypical site. Certainly such evidence is unknown in northern Britain.

It might be expected that the distribution of sherds of amphorae and glass would indicate the locus of the wine-feast at potentate centres, and especially so when, as at Yeavinger in Bernicia (and also at Cadbury Castle in Dumnonia), archaeological traces of putative feasting halls have been recognized. This expectation is founded on several references in *Y Gododdin* (see Jarman 1988, glossary sv *mordai*), of which that in praise of ‘steadfast Breichiawl’ (stanza 21) may be quoted as representative:

Thou didst drink wine and mead in the hall.

Jackson (1969, 124) translates *mordai* here and elsewhere as ‘palace’, perhaps because it is a plural noun.

In the case of the Anglian halls at Yeavinger—and also the British and Anglian halls at Doon Hill—however, there is no such artefactual evidence. The absence of such material from Yeavinger has already been discussed (16.2 above). To what was said there, a further explanation for the absence of pottery and glass sherds may be advanced, namely that Mediterranean amphorae and pottery of Gaulish origin were only imported on the western seaways. This was also true of imported glass vessels.

Currently the largest collection of imported pottery and glass in northern Britain is that from Whithorn. The sheer quantity and variety of material, together with the variety of contexts from which it was recovered (E Campbell 1997a; 1997b) makes it impossible to establish precise social equations. For a clear correlation between pottery distributions and social structures, we must turn to the southern Britons and the defended hall at Cadbury Castle, Somerset (Alcock 1995a, 30–43; 132–9). There, over 160 imported pottery sherds were found, representing three out of four leading classes of imports, as

well as the two distinct exporting areas. These were red-slipped tablewares and amphorae from the mediterranean, and a grey-ware bowl from western Gaul. In all, some 90 individual vessels appear to be represented.

What inferences about on-site activities may be derived from the pottery? The red-slipped dishes and the grey bowl are both tablewares, whereas the amphorae were primarily containers for wine and olive oil. One at least, however had been cracked in antiquity and subsequently repaired: it can only have been used to transport or store dry goods. So far as the archaeological evidence reveals, the major activity of the occupiers of Early Historic Cadbury was the drinking of wine. Such a conclusion, as we have seen, would chime well with the evidence from the Early Welsh poetry, which would also point specifically to the hall as the scene of such activity.

Sherds of imported red-slipped tableware and amphorae were scattered over the whole excavated area of the site: indeed, fragments from a single vessel might be spread over a distance of about 250m (270 yards). Despite this, the spread was neither even nor truly random. Just over half of the total was concentrated in the area where a pattern of postholes suggested the location of a timber hall. Moreover, the majority of these lay within the actual wall-line of the hall. It can hardly be doubted that this concentration of sherds of amphorae, red-slipped tableware and glass drinking-vessels marks a—perhaps even *the*—locus of wine drinking and feasting: indeed, the site of the wine-feast of Early Historic Cadbury.

A detailed comparison of the size of the sherds from the area of the hall with those from a midden beside one of the principal gates demonstrates that an attempt had been made to keep the floor of the hall clean, and consequently most large fragments had been picked up and removed to a dump beside the fort gate. The fact that smaller sherds, and even a few larger ones, were left behind suggests that the floor had been of beaten earth, covered with straw or rushes. In that case, while larger sherds and other rubbish could easily have been picked up and removed in baskets, the small fragments could as easily have been missed in the dimly lit interior.

In broad terms, what we are observing at Cadbury is that wine from imported amphorae was being drunk in glass vessels in a building which on structural grounds may be identified as a noble hall. Food was likewise being served and eaten from fine red-slipped dishes. Much of the debris from such feasting and drinking was then tidied away into middens on the back of the inner rampart. Such a clear picture is not available on any other contemporary site in Britain, and it is therefore of the greatest value towards compensating for our ignorance of northern Britain at that period.

### Meat-eating and other foodstuffs

The verbal and material evidence cited so far has put all the emphasis on drinking. In addition, however, there are occasional references in both Celtic and Anglian circles to meat and to banquets; but in neither case is any particular meat specified. The evidence from Pictish hunting scenes shows that red deer and boar might form at least an element in the diet. To these Dinogad's father would have added fish and grouse (Prologue above). He was a nobleman with at least eight slaves in his household, so this evidence is primarily relevant to the upper classes. But for all we know, the peasants benefited as well, if we accept the Gaelic social philosophy that the Good Lord put the salmon in the burn and the deer on the brae for the benefit of all men.

Evidence about domestic animals has already been discussed above (8.3). From the forts of Dunollie in Dál Riata and Dundurn in Pictland there is evidence that cattle were most numerous, followed then by pig, while sheep/goat formed the minority. Given the great difference in carcass weight between the three species, it may be concluded that the predominance of cattle as a source of meat in the diet was overwhelming (Dunollie: Alcock *et al* 1987, 138 and fiche; Dundurn: Alcock *et al* 1989, 222 and fiche).

In Ireland, however, Lucas has advanced a quite different appreciation of the role of cattle in Heroic society, essentially on the evidence of the early literature: 'there are no beef-eating heroes in Irish literature' (Lucas 1989, 4). He stresses the importance of cows as yielders of milk, and consequently of 'white meat' ie butter and cheese. His assertions have been supported by the analysis of large numbers of animal bones from archaeological sites, especially crannogs, in terms of sex and age of slaughter. This suggests the preferential slaughter of bull calves in favour of the preservation of milk cows (McCormick 1983).

No such body of evidence is available in northern Britain. Driscoll has, however, commented on the cattle bones from Dundurn that '72% had lived beyond two-and-a-half years... [but] it had not been possible to establish a killing-peak for calves, or to establish the existence of a dairy-farming economy' (Driscoll 1989, 222). Finally, beyond any consideration of diet and economy, it should be emphasized that the great demand for vellum, especially for Gospel books, would have been a major factor in the large-scale slaughter of immature cattle (8.3.3).

As for cereals, vegetables and fruits, the evidence is scanty. Wheat may have been grown in low-lying sheltered areas in the southern parts of Bernicia but over most of northern Britain the crops would have been barley and oats. From these, bannocks—thick, round flat cakes—may have been baked on circular iron plates or griddles (Chambers 1911, under 'bannock'). In addition, of course, oats might be served as porridge, and both oats and barley would thicken meat or fish stews. At the appropriate seasons, nuts and wild fruits would be gathered; Dundurn yielded hazelnuts, raspberries and cherries. Beyond these, herbs were probably gathered, or even cultivated in small garden plots, to add flavour. Salt, whether for preserving fish or flesh, or simply to improve taste, cannot have been difficult to obtain in a land surrounded and penetrated by the sea.

Mention of flavour and taste recalls another important natural product: honey. Indeed, this has already been implied by the frequent references to mead, which essentially is brewed from honey. A possible, though inadequate source, would have been from wild bees; but both Welsh and Irish laws demonstrate the importance of bee-keeping, including the value of swarms at various seasons, the right to ownership of swarms, and the need for pledges against trespass by bees—that is to say, bees taking nectar from a neighbour's land (Jenkins 1986, 183-4; Kelly 1988, 124; 165-6). While these examples are taken from outwith northern Britain, it is difficult to believe that there was no similar concern for apiculture there as well. Moreover, bees had the further important role of producing wax, needed for waterproofing; and perhaps more importantly, for wax candles, without which Mass could not have been celebrated.

### Tableware and table manners

A brief consideration of eating habits and table manners may begin with the evidence for cutlery. This comprised no more than a knife, with an iron blade normally some 50-

80mm (2-3 in) long, and a tang for a handle of wood or antler. These are ubiquitous throughout Early Medieval Europe, and in furnished graves it becomes clear that both women and men carried them as an all-purpose personal knife. At meals they could have been used for carving slices off a roasted, baked or boiled joint or carcass, or cutting portions of cheese, butter and bread.

There is no evidence that spoons—and still less forks—had replaced fingers in northern Britain in our period. Indeed, Fernand Braudel has reminded us that as late as the 17th century, no less a person than Louis XIV was praised for his skill at eating chicken stew with his fingers (Braudel 1981, 206).

This comment, seemingly remote to northern Britain, finds its relevance in the frequency of shallow bowls on 7th- and 8th-century sites in western Britain and Ireland. Bowls turned from wood have been found on some crannogs (eg Buiston; Loch Glashan) where they have been preserved by water-logging. But at Buiston and other potentate sites, pottery bowls in a hard-fired fabric had been imported from Gaul. Whether of wood or ceramic, these bowls are of a convenient size to hold in the left hand while eating porridge or stews of meat or vegetables.

In addition to the bowls, the pottery imports included other vessels in the same very hard, rather gritty fabric: jars for both storage and also, as soot-marks show, for cooking; flagons with both tubular and open spouts for pouring ale, mead and wine; and small beakers which were ideal for drinking (some of the beakers had a secondary use for holding spices and unguents). Altogether, these vessels comprised a table-service which was not only practical, but had the additional cachet for a high-status household that they had been imported (illus 22 above).

### 23.1. 2 Recitation and music

The earliest reference in an Early-Historic Insular context to song and poetry occurs in Gildas's denunciation of Maelgwn of Gwynedd in the mid-6th century. This deserves quoting at some length in Winterbottom's colourful translation, which so well captures the flavour of the original:

Your [ie Maelgwn's] excited ears hear not the praises of God from the sweet voices of the tuneful recruits of Christ, nor the melodious music of the church, but empty praises of yourself from the mouths of criminals...stuffed with lies. Hence a vessel...prepared for the service of God is turned into an instrument of the devil.

(*DEB*, 34.6; Winterbottom 1978, 34; 103).

Despite the north Welsh setting, it is generally considered that these comments would also apply to the bards of the northern British courts of Gododdin, Rheged and Strathclyde. Indeed, they refer to a long-lasting custom, both among the northern Britons and more widely: for example, in 1582 George Buchanan wrote of the inhabitants of the Western Isles 'They are exceedingly fond of music... their songs in general celebrate the praises of brave men; their bards seldom choosing any other subject' (cited by Steer & Bannerman 1977, 185). (Parenthetically, Gildas's comments, however distorted, are of the greatest interest because of his references to 'the sweet voices of the tuneful recruits of Christ and *ecclesiasticae melodiae*).

Consistent with the comments of Gildas, the earliest verses of the northern Britons which have been preserved consist of the praise poetry of the late 6th century: Taliesin's stanzas in praise of his several patrons, but chiefly Urien lord of Rheged; and Aneirin's elegies for the *Gododdin* heroes who had perished in the expedition to Catraeth.

Taliesin's initial concern is with the military prowess of his patron. In the case of his first patron, Cynan Garwyn of Powys, this is reflected in a rambling list of expeditions and victories. The verses to Urien are more mature, and in addition to the warrior-image they present the king as distinguished by his standing among his family and retainers at the court of Rheged (Jarman 1992b, 57-8). Part of that standing is based on his generosity, above all to his bard. Urien's magnanimity calls forth the loyalty of his soldiers, and no less that of the poet, for several of Taliesin's poems end with the phrase 'Until I die... I shall not be joyful unless I praise Urien'.

Urien's reign was a time largely of British success against the Angles who were seeking to establish a foothold in the Bamburgh-Lindisfarne area. Consequently, there is a large historical element in these battle poems, though it would not be possible to construct any historical account from them. Taliesin could, indeed, celebrate Urien's refusal to consider a treaty with the Anglian leader Fflamddwyn (above, 9.5.2), and his subsequent resolution to attack Fflamddwyn 'in the midst of his hosts/ and slaughter him and all that go with him'. The verses bristle with stark battle imagery, one of the most striking examples being:

Sleepeth the wide host of England  
With the light in their eyes  
(Saunders Lewis, cited by Jarman 1992a, 62)

For the *Gododdin* bard, however, the historical context of his poetry was one of unmitigated military disaster, the wholly unsuccessful expedition of the men of *Gododdin* against Catraeth (above, 10.5). Against the story-line of defeat, however, Aneirin celebrates the triumph of winning an eternal fame by personal courage and unflinching loyalty to one's lord. In doing so he takes the heroic ideal a stage beyond that praised by Taliesin.

As we have seen, the *Gododdin* poem is not an account of the expedition from the moment of leaving Din Eidyn/Edinburgh to the defeat at Catraeth. Consequently, it is not possible to use it to write a historical narrative. Instead, it consists of about 100 stanzas, in two different manuscript traditions, in the form of elegies on the *Gododdin* warriors slain at Catraeth. Some of the early stanzas celebrate the *Gododdin* band as a body, but most of them are dedicated to individual named warriors, or occasionally to groups of two, three or even more. They do not, however, add up to the poetic—and idealized—total of 300 (11.1.3). As for the number of Angles slain, this is incalculable, for though a tally is sometimes allotted to an individual *Gododdin* hero, we should not easily believe that 'five fifties fell before the blades' of Rhufon Hir (Jarman 1988, l 361).

Given the variety of the individual stanzas within an overall pattern, it is not possible here to present a wide selection. Instead, we may follow Jarman's judgement that nearly all the themes are contained in one stanza:

The warriors arose; they assembled;  
Together, with one accord, they attacked.

Short were their lives, long their kinsmen's' grief for them.  
 They slew seven times their number of the English.  
 By fighting they made women widows,  
 Many a mother with a tear on her eyelid

(Jarman 1992b, 75)

Certain other themes should also be picked out. Firstly there is the unspoken social contract implied by feasting and drinking in the hall of their lord Mynyddog: 'The warband of Mynyddog, famous in battle/ They paid for their mead-feast with their lives' (Jarman 1992b, 72). Then there is the leading heroic ideal of winning, by one's corporeal death, an undying fame: 'He slew a great host...so that he might be praised' (*ibid*, 76). There is another theme which has aroused little comment: 'The poets of the world will be the judges of brave men' (*ibid*, 77). In other words, it is the bard who decrees the code of noble behaviour—at least, in his own eyes.

It must be assumed that the heroic praise-poetry of Taliesin and Aneurin, composed originally in the later 6th century AD, continued to be recited for some centuries, before it came to be written down: indeed, the earliest manuscripts which we possess are as late as the 13th century. In the 9th century, a rather different form of poetry appears, the so-called saga poetry associated with the name of Llywarch the Old. The historical context of this is no longer the conflict of Angles and Britons in northern Britain, but rather that of English and Welsh along the Welsh border. Anachronistically, however, the northern warrior king Urien of Rheged appears as a contemporary of Llywarch (Rowland 1990; Jarman 1992, 81-97).

The major differences between the earlier praise-poetry and the saga poetry are two-fold. Firstly, in terms of structure, it is believed that the poetry was used exclusively for dialogues which were set within stories or sagas which were predominantly in prose. All record of the prose sagas themselves has been lost, while the verse, being more readily remembered, has been preserved.

The second—and more significant—difference lies in the tone of the saga poetry. The heroic ethos of fighting unto death out of loyalty to one's lord, and to preserve one's own honour and gain an undying fame, is now no more than a shadow. Llywarch, who has already sent his 23 older sons to their deaths, is represented as taunting his youngest son Gwên. The most that Gwên will promise is that 'I intend/ that there will be a broken, shattered shield before I retreat' (Rowland 1990, 468)

Llywarch, however, continues his taunting, with the boast:

'When I was the age of yonder youth  
 swiftly did I rush against spears'

To which Gwên replies:

'Without doubt, a credible assertion !  
 Thou livest, thy witness is dead,  
 No man was ever a weakling in his youth  
 (Jarman 1992, 87)

This devastating response of frail humanity to idealized heroism is obviously far more

to a modern taste than is the wine-reared, blood-bolstered action of the *Gododdin*. Such a reaction, however, is not merely anachronistic, but is also inappropriate given the political and military turmoil which was to last for centuries on the Anglo-Welsh border. What is remarkable is that sentiments such as those of Gwên, son of Llywarch, and Heledd, sister of Cynddylan (15.2.4), should be expressed in 9th-century verse, and preserved through the following centuries.

### Role of the Anglo-Saxon bard

We may turn now to the poetry of the Anglo-Saxon settlers, which was composed orally in Old English, that is, the language spoken, in several dialects between the Settlement and c AD 1100. After the conversion of the several English kingdoms much religious poetry was composed, but this did not diminish the taste for secular verse in the heroic mode; indeed, Christian elements might be imported into poems in which the story-line remained essentially Germanic, heroic and pagan (essays in Godden & Lapidge 1991, espec those by Scragg, Frank and Robinson).

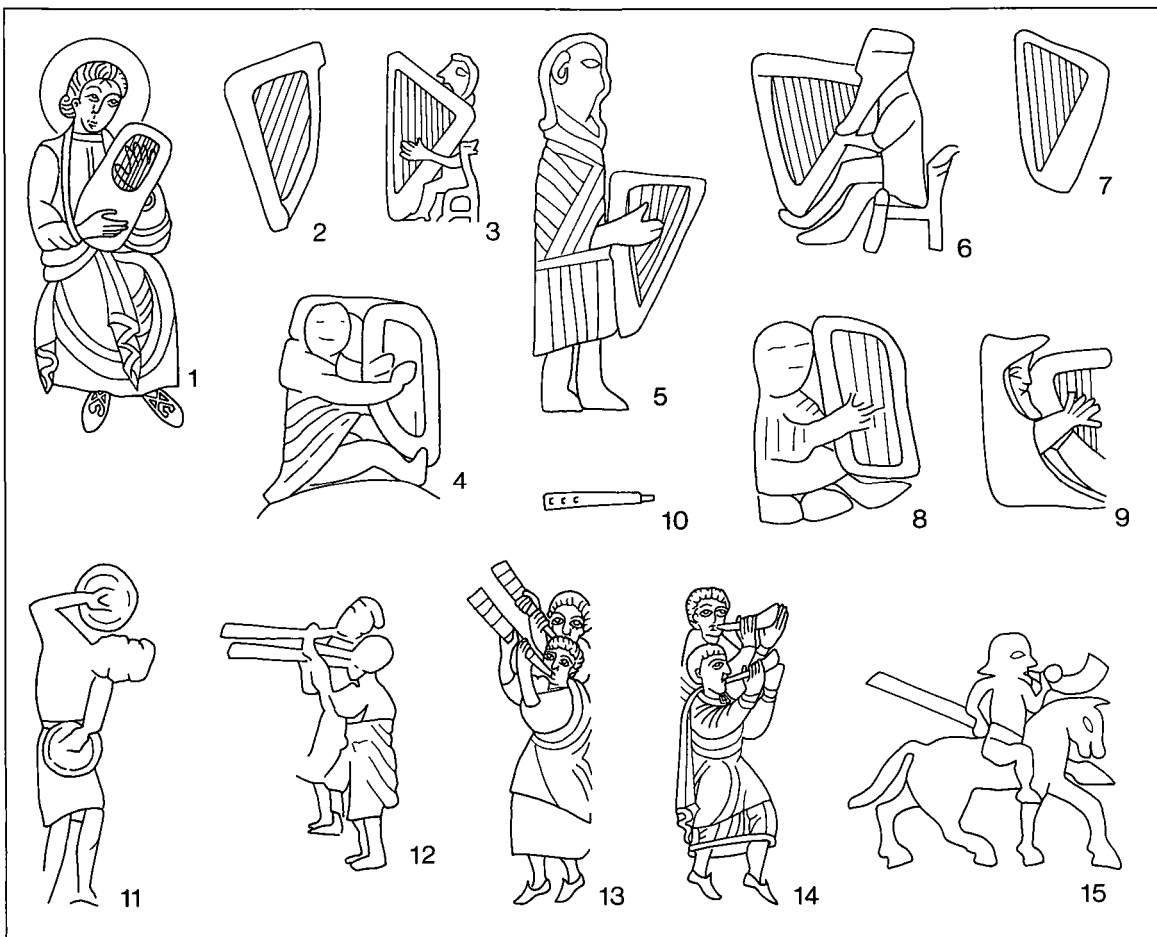
The greatest work, in both its length and the nobleness of its theme, is undoubtedly the poem known, after the name of its hero, as *Beowulf*. Unlike the early Welsh poetry, the name of the author is not known. Moreover, the date of its composition is still a matter of debate, the only fixed point being that we have it in a manuscript of about AD 1000. Beyond this, the earlier consensus date of the 8th century is now questioned, in favour of a later (but how much later?) date. In view of this, the reader may wonder why it finds a place in this book. The answer is that its 3183 lines contain many themes which are not only of some antiquity, but which are also highly revealing of the character of heroic society, and as appropriate to the Celtic as to the Germanic peoples.

*Beowulf* gives us many scattered hints at the pleasures of the hall, but one passage provides an excellent summary: 'There was singing and music together in accompaniment in presence of Healfdene's war-like chieftain; the harp was played, and many a lay rehearsed, when Hrothgar's bard was to provide entertainment in hall along the mead-bench—about...how Hnaef, hero of the half-Danes...fell in deadly fight against the Frisians' (Wrenn 1980, ll 1063-1070).

This passage also indicates the typical subject matter of the lays which might be recited in Old English. Whereas the verse of Taliesin and Aneirin, and the saga poetry of the Llywarch cycle dealt with historical situations which were actual, human and local, the poems enjoyed by the Anglo-Saxons normally related quasi-historical and mythological events which were situated in the continental homelands. Moreover, as in the *Beowulf* poem, the heroes may have been superhuman, but they were not supernatural; by contrast their opponents were inhuman monsters: Grendel, Grendel's mother, and at the end of the hero's life, the dragon of the treasure barrow.

In *Y Gododdin* we learn of the heroic ideal of loyalty to the king, often expressed in terms of paying for one's mead. There is an interesting extension of this concept in *Beowulf*, when the aging hero has been virtually deserted by his companions. Wiglaf attempts to rally support by recalling 'that time at which we drank the mead, how in the beer-hall we pledged ourselves to our lord...that we would repay him for the war equipment, helmets and swords, if any need like this befell him' (Wrenn 1980, ll 2631-2638).

The comments of Gildas among the Britons, and the lines quoted above for the Anglo-Saxons, bear witness to the importance of song and recitation, accompanied most



probably on the lyre, in the royal feasting hall (illus 177). It is perhaps more surprising that secular lays might be recited at table in a monastery; but this is the implication of a letter from Alcuin to an abbot, advising him 'Let the words of God be read at the priests' dinner. It is proper for a reader to be heard there, not a harpist, the words of the Fathers, not the songs of the heathen' (Allott 1974, 155-6).

The most revealing contemporary evidence that the recitation or declamation of heroic poetry in lordly halls was accompanied by music, most probably in the form of chords struck on stringed instruments, comes surprisingly from a lowly social level: Bede's anecdote about the musical talents of the Bernician cow-herd Caedmon, which were first discovered by abbess Hild of Whitby (*HE* iv, 24). Before that, if the company at a social meal decided to take turns at accompanied singing, Caedmon would leave when he saw the instrument coming his way. A point of interest here is the social status of Caedmon, who, on occasion, looks after the cattle at night. His superior is a farm steward or bailiff. This is an unusual and revealing insight into the leisure activities of peasants.

### Harp and lyres

There has been some ambiguity about the instrument which accompanied the songs.

177 Miscellaneous string, percussion and wind instruments from contemporary illustrations:

- 1) Cassiodorus, Psalms; 2) Aldbar;
- 3) Dupplin;
- 4) St Oran's, Iona;
- 5) Tower of Lethendy;
- 6) Monifieth;
- 7) Nigg;
- 8) St Martin's, Iona;
- 9) Archchatton;
- 10) Aldbar;
- 11) Nigg;
- 12) Hilton of Cadboll;
- 13, 14) Vespasian Psalter;
- 15) Dunkeld.

The Old English translation of Bede used the word *hearpe*, 'harp'; but what Bede had written was *cithara*, best translated as 'lyre'. This distinction introduces the two classes of string instruments which were played in northern Britain in our period (illus 177, 1-9).

The lyre has a rectangular resonator or sound box. From this rise two parallel arms, joined by a cross member or wrest-plank, to which a variable number of strings of nearly-equal length are attached (illus 177, 1). The harp, by contrast, has a triangular frame, with strings of variable length.

In western Europe, the lyre certainly goes back to the Bronze Age. The discovery of a wrest-plank made of antler on an Iron Age hillfort at Dinorben in north Wales shows that it was known to the British celts by the 5th century BC (Gardner & Savory 1964, 169-70 with fig 26.3; Savory 1971, 26). The best known and most discussed example in an Early Historic Insular context (in this case Anglian) is the lyre reconstructed from metal fittings and twisted fragments of wood from the Sutton Hoo ship burial (among copious literature, the most important references are: Bruce-Mitford, M & R 1974; Bruce-Mitford, M & R 1983; accessible summary in Evans 1986, 69-72).

The context of the discovery of the Sutton Hoo lyre places it quite definitely in the feasting-hall of a wealthy East Anglian king early in the 7th century AD. The reconstruction has created a playable instrument, of which it has been written: 'the instrument is surprisingly resonant and would have provided excellent accompaniment both to songs and to the speaking of heroic poetry in the ambience of a king's hall' (Evans 1986, 72). On the other hand, with a suggested length of 742mm (29.2in) and width of 209mm (8.2in) (M & R Bruce-Mitford 1983, 689), it would have been somewhat unwieldy for passing from hand to hand in the way which the Caedmon anecdote suggests.

Apart from Bede's use of the word *cithara*, we can infer a knowledge of the lyre in northern Britain, and specifically in Bernicia, from an illustration of David playing such an instrument. This is found in the earliest known copy of Cassiodorus' commentary on the psalms (illus 177, 1 and 116a above), a book which had been written and decorated in the 8th century in a Northumbrian scriptorium, possibly, but not certainly, the monastery at Jarrow. In it, the 'David-portrait' (which may indeed be intended for Christ) is framed in characteristic Insular ornamentation, including both animal and abstract interlace (Bailey 1978). It should be added that the lyre itself is significantly smaller and more handy than that of the Sutton Hoo reconstruction: resting on David's knee, it does not quite reach his shoulder.

Finally, there is a possible example of an antler wrest-plank from the stack-fort of Dun an Fheurain on the west coast of Argyll. Associated finds tend to suggest that the occupation may be dated around—or just after—the middle of the 1st millennium AD. This leaves open the question whether the site and its finds falls before or after the migration of the Irish dynasty of Dál Riata.

Apart from this somewhat doubtful example, the evidence for Early Historic stringed instruments in Dál Riata and Pictland comes wholly from carved stones, and consists entirely of representations of harps (illus 177, 2-9). These first appear, probably around the middle of the 8th century, at Nigg in Ross (*ECMS*, 75) and at Aberlemno No 3 (Roadside) in Angus (*ECMS*, 214; illus 162 above)—that is among both the northern and the southern Picts. In each case, the context is one of David iconography, and in

neither case is the harp being played. The Nigg example is considered to be a triangular harp with seven strings, but the Aberlemno carving is too badly weathered to say more than that it is probably triangular.

For a Pictish example of a harp actually being played, we may cite the Dupplin cross, dated, as we have seen (18.1.4; 22.2.3), around AD 820 (illus 177, 3 & 178). Here David is seated on a throne, playing a large triangular harp (*ECMS*; 1993, Part III: Nigg, Fig 72; Aberlemno, Fig 288; Dupplin, Fig 334. Fuller discussion in Trench-Jellicoe 1997).

At about the same time—and in any case within the 8th century—harps appear at Iona. That on St Oran's cross appears to be triangular (RCAHMS 1982, 192-7; illus 195-6), whereas that on St Martin's cross is quadrangular (RCAHMS 1982, 204-8; illus 205). In each case the harp is being played by a figure sitting on the ground. Another harpist, apparently likewise seated on the ground, is to be seen in mainland Argyll at Ardchattan (RCAHMS 1975, 110-11, fig 99); this is considered to be of 10th-century date.

The 8th-/early 9th-century harps are of considerable interest in historical musicology. Indeed, it has been said that 'the early dating of these examples presents a perplexing problem' (quoted by Henderson 1986, 110). More recently, however, Purser has found no difficulty in accepting these dates (Purser 1992, 31-3). Indeed, he writes that 'the simple fact is that the largest body of evidence from the eighth century to the tenth century for the existence of triangular framed harps comes from the Pictish stones, so the natural conclusion is that this form of harp originated among them'.

This judgement may be over-simple, however. Given the complicated political relations between the Picts and Scots throughout much of the 8th century, and given also the good representations of harps on Iona and at Ardchattan, it seems likely that the Scots of Dál Riata should share with the Picts the credit for the development of the triangular harp in northern Britain.

Before leaving the topic of harps and lyres, we should notice briefly their appropriateness for accompanying not only the declaiming of praise-poetry in the lord's hall, but equally important, the chanting of the Psalms. This is of course referred to obliquely in the carvings with Davidian iconography (Henderson 1986). We should also recall the very great importance of the Psalms in the liturgy.



Finally, for the sake of completeness, this account of musical instruments depicted in northern Britain in the 8th and 9th centuries should be extended to include those which were unlikely to have accompanied the recitation of praise poetry in a lordly hall (illus 177, 10-15). These would include the long, straight trumpets, possibly of bronze, which we shall later see on the hunting field at Hilton of Cadboll and Aberlemno Roadside. At Aldbar, beside the harp, is a tapering tubular object which is sometimes described as a



178  
Detail from the  
Dupplin cross:  
David enthroned,  
as a harpist  
(*National Museums  
of Scotland*).

staff, perhaps because that is considered appropriate for David the Shepherd (Henderson 1986, 89). At the bottom end of this, however, there is what looks like a mouthpiece. Purser mistakenly attributes this to Nigg, where there is no such object, but his description of 'a wind instrument with some kind of enclosed reed' (Purser 1992, 33) would fit the Aldbar carving excellently. On St Martin's cross, the harpist is faced by a kneeling figure with triple pipes (RCAHMS 1982, 205). The only percussion instrument recorded within the period of this study is a pair of cymbals in a Davidian context at Nigg.

## 23.2 FIELD SPORTS

### 23.2.1 Hunting

The most esteemed of outdoor pursuits in our period were undoubtedly hunting and hawking. Detailed evidence for these is provided by Pictish figural sculpture on cross-stele of the 8th and 9th centuries. These may be supplemented to some degree by written evidence for Scotland (Gilbert 1979); and also for high medieval and Renaissance Europe (Cummins 1988). Although there are occasional illustrations of the two sports on Anglian, Irish and Welsh sculptures, they lack both the lively realism and the accuracy of the Pictish examples, so the present account concentrates on the latter.

It is necessary first to define a hunting scene. Allen (*ECMS* I, 407-8) lists a total of 27 examples in Pictland; but many of these (especially at Meigle) depict a rider with a spear and one or more dogs, but no prey (eg *illus* 171, 15). On the assumption that when a country gentleman goes to visit neighbours he naturally takes the dogs and a weapon (nowadays a 12-bore) with him, in the hopes of putting up a hare or a wood-pigeon, the Meigle stones might be placed in the category of social visiting rather than hunting. In the present account, a hunting scene requires three elements: a hunter, a weapon, and a prey. On this basis, the list is reduced to only 12 examples, plus two crossbowmen.

Unhappily, what ought to have been the simplest image, that of a cloaked and hooded man, kneeling on one knee, and aiming a crossbow, provides only one clear story line, St Vigean 1 (*illus* 51 above; *ECMS* III, 250; Gilbert 1976; on crossbows in general see also MacGregor 1976, and 12.1.4 above). The importance of the St Vigean's stone is not only that it tells a straightforward story, but that it is held to be closely dated to AD 839 x 842 by virtue of an inscription naming the Pictish king Uurad, son of Bargoit (Clancy 1993). The upper part of the stone depicts a very mixed menagerie, but the bottom register has just two actors: the kneeling bowman, towards whom a large boar with a vicious tusk is advancing. Since there is no sign of a dog to flush the boar, we may assume that the hunter has been waiting in ambush on a trail known to be used by the animal. We may doubt whether a crossbow bolt, perhaps 80mm (3 ins) long, could halt the momentum of a charging boar. In reality, the hunter would probably have intended to fire at the boar's flank; but the perspective problems involved in depicting this would have been beyond the skills of the sculptor.

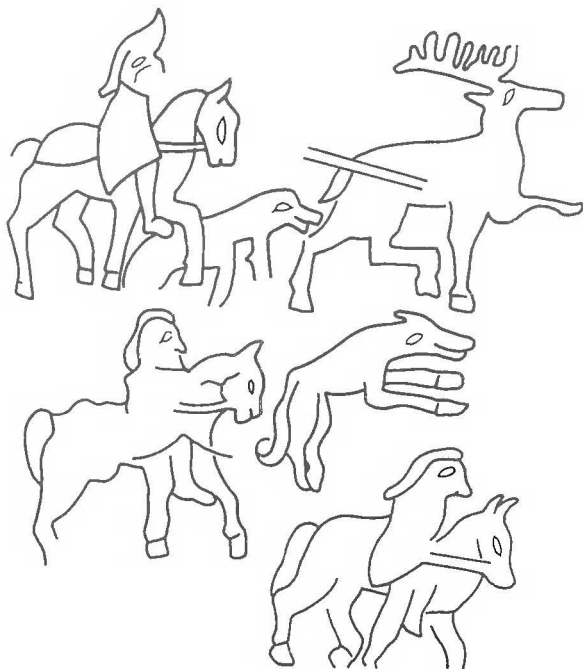
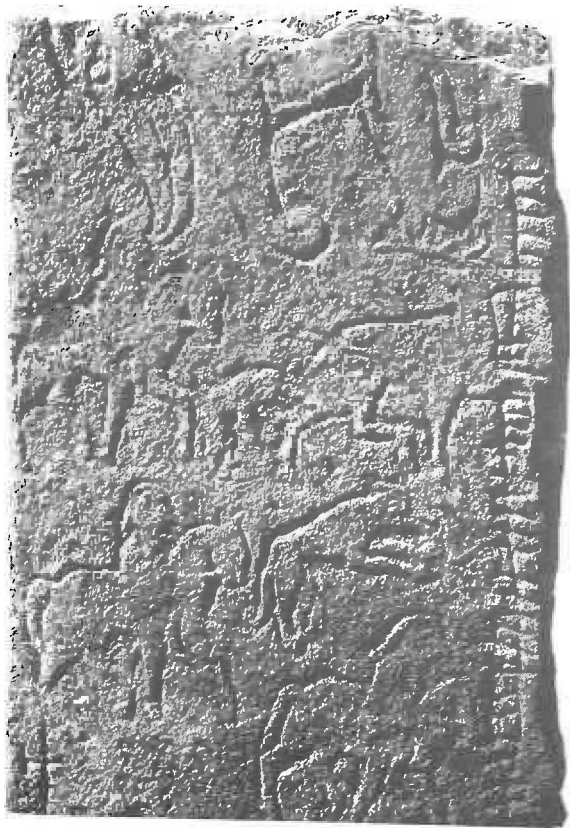
Shandwick (*ECMS* III, 69) also depicts a bowman, amid a rich mixture of freely-arranged vignettes of hunting and other actions. One of these shows a bowman aiming at a stag which looks back towards him. A dog (?) between man and stag may have been used to flush out the deer; but we are left with the question, is the hawk behind the man also part of the action?

## Hunting on foot

We come next to hunters on foot. In the Prologue we have already noted the hunting scene at Eassie. This shows a man who carries a spear in his right hand and, in his left, a shield. He strides purposefully forward to the chase: two dogs, probably a mastiff and a greyhound or lurcher (greyhound-cross), pursue a stag with a seven-pointed head of antlers. This small hunting party contains all that is needed to chase the deer, bring it to a stand, and finally despatch it. We should again recall here the account (quoted in the Prologue) of the hunting exploits of Dinogad's father in the northern British lullaby which reinforces the authenticity of the Eassie scene as one method of hunting.

There are other depictions of hunters on foot, for instance at Nigg (*ECMS* III, 81) and Kirriemuir 2 (*ECMS* III, 240), but they add nothing to the information which we derive from Eassie. Finally, there is a huntsman with spear, shield and two lurchers on the St Andrews sarcophagus (illus 79; 166). This, however, is so loaded with religious symbolism, combined with Mediterranean motifs, that it cannot safely be used to establish Insular methods of hunting. The most elaborate, and indeed costly, form of the chase was that in which the hunters—normally in the plural—pursued the deer on horseback, assisted by dogs. The liveliest depiction of such a chase is that at Scoonie (*ECMS*, 360; illus 179). There, a stag with a noble head of antlers is pursued by three riders and two large and ferocious dogs. One of these is about to cripple the stag by biting its rear leg. Other stones show the dogs in even closer contact: for instance at Burghead No 7 (*ECMS*, II, 138; here illus 62) a hound is seizing the stag's throat from below, a deed which seems as likely to be fatal for the dog as for the deer!

179  
Stag-hunt: hunting on horse with dogs and spear; segment of the Scoonie stone, Fife (*ECMS*), with explanatory outline drawing.



It is evident that the role of the dogs is firstly to flush and drive the deer, and then to bring it to bay by crippling it so that it can be despatched by the spears of the hunters. It should be stressed that even a crippled stag, with its array of lethally sharp antlers, is a dangerous beast: hence the need for arm's length weapons. But Scoonie also demonstrates that the spear may actually be thrown during the chase, for the uppermost rider has flung his spear and planted it in the flank of the stag.

### Hunting on horseback

An altogether more stately hunt is seen on the rear face of the cross stele from Hilton of Cadboll (illus 180). Its formality is emphasized by an elaborate frame: at bottom and sides there are Celtic scrolls and interlace, while above the figural panel are Pictish symbols, themselves lavishly decorated. Within this frame are two registers of figures. At top centre is a woman of high rank,



180  
Hilton of Cadboll:  
hunting scene  
(National Museums  
of Scotland).

who sits sideways (not side-saddle, as is often suggested, anachronistically) on a horse which is ambling to the viewer's left. Because it would be difficult for the rider to control a horse while sitting sideways, she is supported by a groom, whose nose, beard and horse's legs appear behind her (Stevenson 1959, after *ECMS*). She wears on her breast a large penannular brooch, as befits her rank. Top left are the Pictish mirror and comb symbols. Behind her is a dog of uncertain breed; and then at the extreme right, two trumpeters.

In the lower register are two horsemen trotting to the left. In common with other Pictish mounted hunters, they carry spears in their right hands, and have small circular targes on their left. Bottom left is a hind (or less probably a *hummel* or antler-less stag), which is attacked by two rather slender dogs: probably greyhounds or lurchers. One of them seizes the deer by its haunch, the other by the shoulder. Plainly the beast is about to be brought down, to be finished off by spears.

So far, this account has been straightforwardly descriptive; an exercise worthwhile, and indeed necessary in itself, if we are to use this and other Pictish scenes as witnesses to the past. It is, however, susceptible to several layers of interpretation. We may begin with social and ceremonial aspects. The Hilton of Cadboll lady is a very unusual woman—in fact one of the two apparently secular women in Pictish art (the apparent woman with loom on the Kirriemuir stone (*ECMS* III, 227 fig 239B) being the other). It is not unreasonable to think of her as a queen. Secondly, because of her seating, she cannot be taking an active part in the chase. Essentially she is a spectator, enjoying the thrill of the hunt, the several beauties of the deer, the horses and the hounds, and the manliness of her consort, the leading huntsman, in an exciting and potentially dangerous pursuit.

At Hilton of Cadboll, unlike at Eassie, the hunting scene is on the rear of the slab—that is, the face without a cross. Should we nonetheless be reading a religious interpretation here too? The Pictish symbols, which fill more space than the hunt itself, probably bore some arcane significance. Moreover, the decorative border and lower panel would be appropriate to the decorated pages of a Gospel book. It seems likely that this elaborate framing is intended not only to enhance the secular importance of the figural scene, but also to hint at an inner religious meaning. Is the lady not merely a queen, but the Queen

of Heaven, *Maria Regina*, a concept already established in the Western church by the 6th century (*Encyclopedia*, 540; Alcock 1998, 53)?.

At Aberlemno No 3 (Roadside), about 85 crow-fly miles (140km) from Hilton of Cadboll, there is a closely similar figural scene, though it lacks the elaborate framing of Hilton. Moreover, it is severely weathered, so that the identification of some of the animals is uncertain (illus 181). The size and position of the dominant rider, at top centre, suggest that he is probably a king. In front, and slightly below, is a lesser rider, while behind the king are two trumpeters, as at Hilton of Cadboll. In the middle register, to the left is a foot-soldier with a notched shield, but apparently no weapon. He stands in front of two more riders; between them is an enigmatic creature, possibly a dog. In the bottom register, to the right is a deer attacked by a lurcher, and, to the left, two deer, one of which is attacked simultaneously by two lurchers. None of the deer have antlers, and the bottom left one is notably smaller than the others, so we are probably seeing two hinds and a fawn.



Below the hunting scene, to the right, King David holds the jaws of a lion, from which he has just rescued a lamb, and beside his head is a triangular harp, symbolizing the Psalmist.

Because of this undoubted Davidian iconography, it has been suggested that two elements in the hunting scene also have Davidian significance. The first is the pair of trumpeters seen at top right both at Aberlemno and Hilton of Cadboll. It is true that similar trumpeters accompany David, for instance in the *Canterbury Psalter* (Vespasian A.1; Henderson 1967, fig 38; 1986, pl 5.7A). We may also note that in a 9th-century poem celebrating an imperial Carolingian hunt, the deer were roused by blasts on a straight trumpet, *tuba*, not a horn, *cornu* (*pace* Godman 1985, 256-7, but following the original Latin, not the English translation). It seems reasonable to suggest that even if Pictish carvers had known of manuscript models, they accepted such images because they referred to objects that were already familiar in their everyday world.

As for the man with the notched shield: such shields do occur on monuments which have unambiguous Davidian iconography, notably the St Andrews sarcophagus, and possibly the Nigg cross-stele. But there is no Old Testament justification for casting David himself in the role of a hunter on foot. It is more plausible to accept the man at Aberlemno as one of the beaters or other followers on foot who appear commonly in medieval accounts of the chase.

### The huntsman's prey

At this point, some comments are needed on the huntsman's prey. Except for the boar

181  
The Aberlemno  
No 3 (Roadside)  
hunting scene  
(*Historic Scotland*).

at St Vigean, the hunted beast is regularly a deer. In Britain there are two native deer, red and roe; but where the highly diagnostic antlers are depicted, it is certain that the prey are red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), not the smaller roe (*Capreolus capreolus*). There are particularly fine antlers on the stags at Grantown (*ECMS*, fig 131; here illus 157 above) and Scoonie (*ibid*, fig 360; here illus 179). Deer without antlers may be *hummels*, that is to say, malformed stags without antlers; but they are more probably hinds, that is to say, female deer. Since the presence or absence of antlers is such a simple indicator of sex, it is surprising to find several commentators describing the Aberlemno beasts as 'stags'. In fact, the overall ratio of stags and hinds on Pictish stones is roughly equal.

In contrast to our contemporary image of red deer as creatures of open moorland and hills, in earlier times their native habitat was the open woodland of pine and oak, where, in addition to grazing, they browsed on the lower branches (Clutton-Brock *et al* 1982). One implication of this is that the chase took place not in the open, but among trees: a fact which it is easy to overlook because the Pictish carver did not normally depict vegetation. We may note that in the Carolingian poet's account of the hunt of Louis the Pious, the entire wood resounded to the hound's clamorous baying (Godman 1985, 256-7). It should not be thought, however, that low branches would have added to the hazards of the chase, for they are likely to have been browsed away by the deer.

We must also shed another modern perception, namely that red deer were quite small creatures, about the height of a pony. It is true that a modern, fully mature specimen with a 12-point head of antlers might measure no more than 1.04m (3ft 5in) at the shoulder and 1.7m (5ft 7in) long. In contrast, a skeleton from a peat bog in East Lothian stood 1.37m (4ft 6in) at the shoulder, and was 2.38m (7ft 10in) long. It is suggested that this was 'at least a third as large again...and probably weighed twice as much' as a modern specimen (Pearsall 1968, 328). This is consistent with the observation that the stag at Scoonie stands as high as do the horses. This may have been a reason for pursuing the smaller hinds.

### Hunting methods

How does the evidence for hunting methods which we derive from the Pictish sculptures compare with Gilbert's account (1979, 52ff) of medieval hunting in Scotland? Firstly, there is no evidence that deer were driven into an ambush; all the evidence is that they were pursued by men on horseback—or occasionally on foot—in both cases with the assistance of dogs. The dogs appear mostly to have been long, rather slender animals, greyhounds or possibly lurchers (greyhound-crosses); perhaps the same breed as the sharply delineated hound at Ardross (*ECMS*, 53), which Gordon roundly declared to be a deerhound (1966, 216). The Scoonie dogs, however, seem more substantial, and the Eassie hunter certainly has two breeds, a greyhound and a mastiff. Leaving Eassie (and Kirriemuir 2) out of account, the Pictish sculptures agree well with Gilbert's statement (1979, 56) that in one form of the chase 'greyhounds were sent after the game in a straight chase with the huntsman following on horseback'. Incidentally, Cummins remarks (1988, 13) that 'Britain, particularly Scotland, was celebrated for the production of greyhounds in the Roman period and through the Middle Ages'.

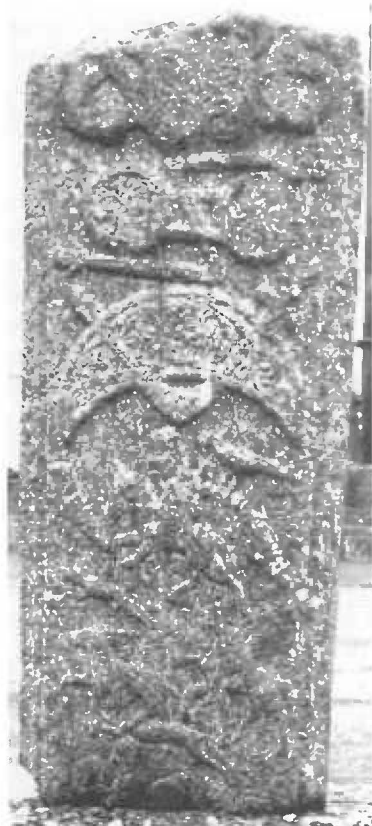
One other method of catching deer is far removed from the excitement of the chase. This was the use of a wooden trap, which was set into the ground, and lightly covered over. The weight of a deer treading on the trap released a rod, which then grasped the deer's foot (Reid 1922). A well-preserved example was discovered by chance in the Moss of

Auquharney, Aberdeenshire. It had been assumed that this was about 500 years old. Recently, however, on the initiative of the Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, a radiocarbon assay was obtained which indicated a date in the 6th century AD (information from Neil Curtis, Marischal Museum). This puts it firmly in the Pictish period.

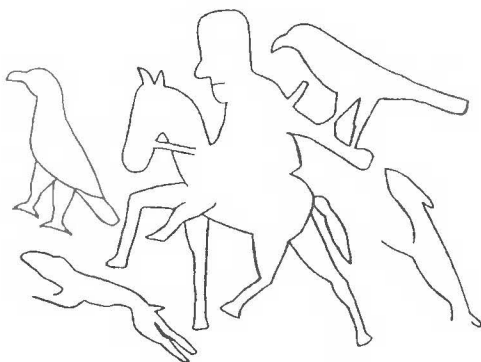
### 23.2.2 Hawking

The most highly esteemed of field sports was not, however, the deer-chase, but hawking, especially with falcons. A pictorial indicator of its status in a medieval context is given in the Bayeux Tapestry, where only three nobles carry a hawk: Earl Harold, Count Guy, and Duke William (good illustrations in Stenton (ed) 1957). They may be said to be travelling on a social occasion with political undertones. Among the Picts, we have an example at Fowls Wester (*ECMS* III, fig 306B) of a horseman carrying a hawk (just discernible behind his shoulder) not because he is hunting—for no prey is depicted—but apparently simply to display his nobility.

Moreover, there is abundant written evidence that hawks were highly prized gifts among persons of importance, whether secular or ecclesiastical. Obviously the bulk of the evidence comes from the High Middle Ages and later; but in Anglo-Saxon England a royal interest in hawking can be demonstrated as early as the 8th century, broadly contemporary with the carving on the Elgin cathedral cross-slab (one of the earliest depictions of the developed sport in Europe: illus 182; Hicks 1986, 162; Oggins 1981). Finally we should note the enthusiasm for hawking that is displayed at Imperial level, by the Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (Wood & Fyfe 1943: 1969, Books IV & V).



The attraction of falconry owed nothing to its very minor contribution to noble larders, and everything to its sheer excitement. Because falcons cannot take prey on the ground, they have to swoop on birds in flight. The elements of the action are indicated in the upper register of the Elgin stone. This shows a horseman carrying a falcon on his left wrist, and accompanied by two dogs. On the ground in front, another bird probably represents the prey, very likely a red grouse (*ECMS* III, fig 137A; here illus 182).



182  
The Elgin cross-slab (*I Shepherd*) with outline drawing [by the author] of the hawking scene.

The first task of the dogs is to locate the prey, which cowers among low vegetation. The hawk is then flown to some height, where it 'waits on' until the dogs flush the prey into the air. The hawk then 'stoops' at a speed estimated as between 100 and 200 miles per hour (160-320 kph), killing the prey outright (Brown 1978, 238-9). Even more thrilling, and especially approved by the Emperor Frederick, was to fly a hawk against a crane or heron, which was driven higher and higher until the hawk could get high enough to make its stoop.

No doubt one of the attractions for kings and nobles was the power made visible by proxy. It should be added that the sheer trouble and expense involved in falconry made it a rich man's pastime. From the taking of fledglings from the eyrie or the capture of adults on the wing, there was a long and tedious process of taming (if such a term can be used) the bird to the falconer's will (classic account, Lascelles 1892; more recent account, Cummins 1988, chaps 15 & 16). It is not surprising that the chief falconer was an important officer at the court of an early medieval Welsh king, entitled to sit at the king's table next to the heir apparent (Jenkin 1986, 7).

183  
The Kirriemuir  
(No 2), Angus,  
hunting scene  
(after *ECMS*).



The possible hawking scene on the cross-face of the Kirriemuir No 2 stele is more difficult to interpret, partly because the deer chase on the other face is somewhat bungled, casting doubt on the sculptor's skill (illus 183). As at Eassie, there is a man on foot to

the (viewer's) left of the cross, but he carries not a spear in his right hand, but a curious staff in the left hand. To the right of the cross in the lower part of the panel are three weathered carvings of animals, possibly hounds. Above them is an apparently dead stag, its tongue lolling out as Allen observed (*ECMS*, III, fig 240A), its fore-limbs curiously folded beneath it, while above it is a bird of prey.

One interpretation of the stag and bird scene is that the bird is perhaps an eagle, which sometimes feed on carrion; but this ignores the man with the staff. A more plausible scenario is that the deer has just been killed by a hunting eagle, which cannot carry off such a weight. Indeed, it is unlikely that even a golden eagle could successfully attack a red deer. But there are records of eagles attacking roebucks (Brown 1978, 182), which are about the size of a mature goat; and the antler of this animal (if not bungled by the sculptor) looks more like that of a roe than a red deer. So we may think that the man's 'curious staff' is a perch to take the weight of the eagle, which he has just flown successfully at the roebuck.

While the social symbolism of the hawk is clear enough, it is more difficult to establish any Christian significance, despite the apparent implications of the bird of prey and the dead

deer on the cross-face of the Kirriemuir carving. Cummins explores the medieval symbolism of falconry, which includes an association between falconry and profane love. Occasionally, however, it may refer to aspects of divine love, including the mystic union of the human soul with God (Cummins 1988, cap 20, espec 230-1).

### 23.2.3 Riding, travel and racing

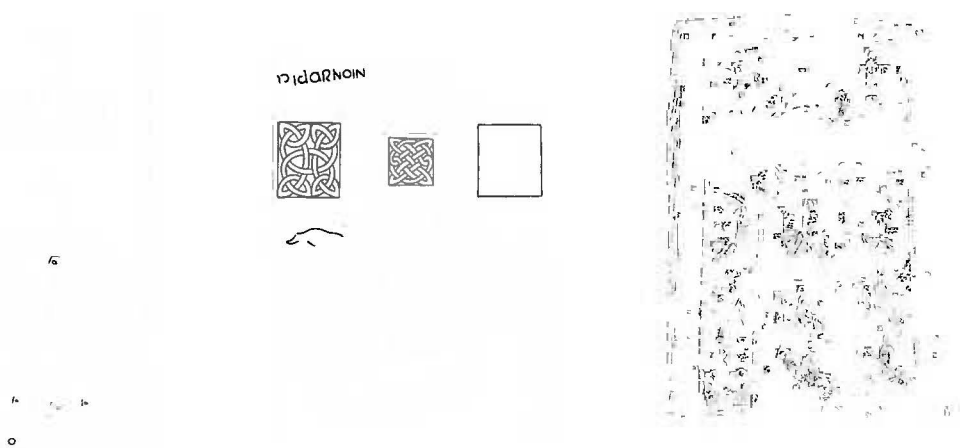
Important though the horse was in hunting and hawking, its major importance was, of course, for transport and travel. Of transport, whether by packhorse, or more rarely by cart or waggon, there is little evidence. In pictorial terms, we have at Meigle (stone No 10) a two-wheeled covered vehicle drawn by two horses, a rather splendid equipage for noble passengers (*ECMS*, III, fig 344). In Pictland, wheeled vehicles may have been able to make some use of the remains of the former Roman road system.

For those who could afford the costs of maintaining horses, they provided the most desirable way of travel, whether for social or administrative purposes; for evangelizing remote districts; or in warfare. The costs alone ensured that only potentates and some of their servants could enjoy the privilege, so riding acquired a distinct social cachet. Riding, as we have seen, might lead on to the sports of hunting and hawking.

But even a simple journey in the staid company of a bishop might have its exciting, even hazardous, moments. Bede recounts an anecdote in which a mixed party of priests and laymen, accompanying bishop John of Beverley, came to a level stretch of ground suitable for horse-racing. The bishop, regarding this as an idle, unprofitable pursuit, only reluctantly agreed that they might race competitively. The outcome was that his acolyte Herebald suffered a serious spill, which was followed by a miraculous recovery at the hands of the bishop (*HE* v, 6).

For Bede, the point of the story lay in the bishop's healing power. For us, however, there are several points of profane interest. Firstly, Herebald was riding an excellent (*optimum*) horse which the bishop himself had given him. Secondly, although the bishop had specifically forbidden him to race, at the sight of his peers' activity he found himself overcome by wanton (or frisky or sportive) feelings: *lascivo superatus animo*. In this phrase, Bede unintentionally reveals the excitement which any young man might feel at this impromptu contest. If a competitive race could come about so casually, we can hardly doubt that in other circumstances horse-races were frequently—perhaps even regularly—arranged.

Such races do not appear to be mentioned in our written sources, nor do they feature in Pictish carvings. But riders as such, including some carrying a targe and spear (but only rarely a sword), are very common, occurring on at least 17 Class II stones and eight of Class III. Normally the riders occur on the rear face (ie that without a cross), suggesting that they are going about secular activities. On about a quarter of all stones, however, the riders are on the cross-face itself, sometimes in what may be regarded as a significant position (illus 184). Normally this means that one of a group of two or three is actually placed within the frame of the lower stem of the cross. At Rossie Priory there are three riders one above the other on the lower stem (*ECMS*, III, fig 322B). At Fordoun (*ibid*, fig 217B), a rider occupies the lower arm of an equal-armed cross, with another rider to each side, and an ornate Pictish 'spectacles and Z-rod' symbol below to give further emphasis.



- 184  
Depiction of  
horsemen in  
association with the  
Cross:  
(1) Edderton, Ross  
and Cromarty;  
(2) Fordoun,  
Aberdeenshire;  
(3) Rossie,  
Perthshire.

Even more remarkable, at Bressay (*ECMS*, III, fig 4), a diminutive rider stands beneath the cross flanked by two very much larger clerics. The stone displays such great iconographic diversity—including perhaps a modified Jonah scene forming the top frame—that no easy interpretation can be offered. Finally for this account, at Edderton (*ibid*, fig 82) the stele has a cross on each face. The smaller cross stands on top of an arch within which is a weaponless rider, while below are two other riders with swords, spears and targes. The arch might be thought to represent a burial mound, in which the upper rider is buried; but it is perhaps more likely to be a mound, natural or artificial, on which a cross has been set up as a praying station or a marker for the bounds of an ecclesiastical estate. The rider may then be seen as standing in front of the mound, in the best perspective that the sculptor could achieve.

This association of the cross with riding suggests that we may be seeing a ceremonial riding around the bounds of a monastic estate. We may recall Martin Martin's account of the 'anniversary Cavalcades' which the 17th-century inhabitants of the Western Isles made on horseback on Michaelmas Day (Martin 1716; 1970, 52 & 79-80). Such cavalcades took place on firm sandy ground on the sea shore, and were associated with horse-racing for small prizes.



*Thus cavalcades, racing and riding form part of the gradual progression from holy day to holiday, a merging of the religious and the secular which bring us back full circle to the image presented in the Prologue: the stone of Eassie which combined the supreme religious imagery of cross and angels with the robust appeal of the deer hunt.*

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## ENVOI

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The penultimate version of this study terminated with the final sentence of Chapter 23. The Editor remarked on the abruptness of this ending, and requested that I should compose something more suitable. She liked the piece which I then wrote so much that she decided to place it at the beginning of the volume as part of the Preface, and persuaded me to create a further valedictory paragraph or two to explain the major aims and themes of this work and my approach to it.

In my original Envoi I made the point that, given the character of my early training and subsequent experience, both in the field and in interpretative writings, it may be expected that some of the interpretations and emphases presented here may be unacceptable to some schools of modern (or 'post-modern') thinking. In particular, much attention has been paid to religious—and especially Christian—topics in both the material and the spiritual aspects.

These topics appear not only in accounts of paintings and sculpture, but also in wider and deeper aspects of the mentalities of the period. This approach should not be attributed to the author's own religious leaning; the mentalities of the era were largely inspired by religious thinking, whether pagan or Christian of several clashing creeds. Even the sternest of atheists must recognise that any open-minded historian will strive to understand the religious beliefs of the period.

Another distinction which has in the past been made is that between works of art—in this case, poetry as well as sculpture—and traditional historical sources. A major theme of this book is that such distinctions and divisions obstruct a holistic understanding of society in action over time. Beyond that, I am well aware of the puritanical belief that history and archaeology are totally separate disciplines, and should remain so. My personal view is that, in the centuries covered by the present study, the evidence available in each discipline is so scant and fragile that we cannot afford to ignore the least scrap of it. Nor can we afford to shrink from making every attempt to interpret that evidence and set it in as broad a picture as we can. It is to be hoped that this volume has made some useful steps in that direction.



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## GAZETTEER OF SECULAR SITES

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The gazetteer lists sites in alphabetical order with each name followed by its site number (in brackets) as used on the map (illus 3) and shown on the key below. The site name is followed by: the old county name; a six-figure grid reference; where appropriate, an indication of occupation in the pre-Roman Iron Age [I], or in the Roman period [RO], or the occurrence of Roman material in a 'reliquary' context (as, for instance, at Dumbarton) [RR]; the evidence for the Early Historic chronology of the site; and finally, a summary bibliography.

1 Freswick Sands Broch	23 East Lomond	46 Castle Haven
2 Keiss Broch	24 Dumyat	47 Cruggleton
3 Dun Ardtreck	25 Castle Craig	48 Isle of Whithorn
4 Urquhart Castle	26 Stirling	49 Whithorn
5 Castle Hill Inverness	27 Dumbarton Rock ( <i>Alt Clut</i> )	50 Dunollie (? <i>Caput regionis</i> )
5* Craig Phadraig	28 Dalmahoy	51 An Dun, Clenamacrie
6 Burghead	29 Din Eidyn	52 Dun an Fheurain
7 Green Castle, Portknockie	30 Dunbar	53 Leccamore
8 Cullykhan	31 Doon Hill	54 Dun Chonallaich
9 Castle Tioram	32 Castlehill, Dalry	55 Eilean Rìgh - 1
10 The Torr, Shielfoot	33 Buiston crannog	56 Bruach an Druimein
11 Aldclune	34 Harehope	57 Ardifuir - 1
12 Dunnottar	35 Kirk Hill, St Abb's	58 Loch Glashan
13 Cnoc na Sroine, Mull	36 Lindisfarne	59 Dunadd
14 Dun mac Sniachan	37 Bamburgh	60 Dun a'Chrannag
15 King's Seat, Dunkeld	38 Milfield	61 Dun a'Choin Duibh
16 Inchtuthill	39 Yeavinger/ Yeavinger Bell	62 Dun Skeig
17 Moncrieffe Hill	40 Crock Cleuch	63 Dun Fhinn
18 Dundurn	41 Sprouston	64 Ugadale
19 Forteviot	42 Ruberslaw	65 Kildonan
20 Dunsinane	43 Tynron Doon	66 Kildalloig
21 Clatchard Craig	44 Birdoswald	67 Little Dunagoil
22 St Andrews	45 Mote of Mark	

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ALDCLUNE (11), Perth; NN 894 642; RR; jewellery; Triscott 1980 (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1980, 82-3).

AN DUN (51), CLENAMACRIE, Argyll; NM 928 283; rotary querns in dun wall; RCAHMS 1975, 77-8.

ARDIFUIR (57), Argyll; NR 789 969; RR; metalworking; imported pottery (E); RCAHMS 1992, 171.

BAMBURGH (37), Northumberland; NU 18? 34??; I; RO; historical references (*Bebbanburgh*) (*HE* iii, 6; iii, 12; iii, 16); Hope-Taylor 1966; Alcock 1983.

BIRDOSWALD (44), Cumberland; NY 615 663; RO; post-Roman buildings; Wilmott 1989, 288-9.

BRUACH AN DRUIMEIN (56), Argyll; NR 820 972; beads; RCAHMS 1988, 204.

- BUISTON (33), Ayrs; NS 416 433; RR; imported pottery (E), bonework, jewellery, metal-working, dendrochronology; Munro 1882, 190-239; Crone 2000.
- BURGHEAD (6), Moray; NJ 109 691; (I?); RO; Pictish stones; C-14 age-estimates; Shepherd 1986, 141-2.
- CASTLE CRAIG (25), Clackmannans; NS 911 976; hierarchical plan; Feacham 1963, 1980, 114; Alcock *et al* 1989, illus 12.3.
- CASTLE HAVEN (46), Kirkcuds; NX 593 482; jewellery; Barbour 1907, 68-80; RCAHMS 1914, 46-8.
- CASTLEHILL DALRY (32), Ayrs; NS 287 537; RR; jewellery; glass; Smith, J 1919; Alcock 1996.
- CASTLE HILL INVERNESS (5), Inverness; NH 667 450; literary references: ? *Brudei munitio*; VC 74b; 79b; 81b; 14b; Henderson 1975, 91-108; Close-Brooks, J 1986b, 21.
- CASTLE TIORAM (9), Inverness; NM 662 724; metalwork; Kilbride-Jones 1937; Simpson, WD 1954 (*Trans GAS*, 13, 70-90).
- CLATCHARD CRAIG (21), Fife; NO 243 178; I, RO; imported pottery (E), metalworking, C14 age-estimates; Walker & Ritchie 1987.
- CNOC NA SROINE (13), Argyll; NM 555 433; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1980, 99-100; Alcock *et al* 1989.
- CRAIG PHADRAIG (5\*), Inverness; NH 640 452; I; imported pottery (E), metalworking, C14 age-estimates; Small & Cottam 1972 (Int rep Univ Dundee Dept Geog); Alcock 1984.
- CROCK CLEUCH (40), Roxburgs; NT 833 176; 'post-Roman native' pottery, Anglo-Saxon annular brooch; Steer & Keeney 1947; RCAHMS 1956, 348-50.
- CRUGGLETON (47), Wigtown; NX 484 428; C-14 age-estimate, timber building; Ewart *et al* 1985 (Excav rep, *Dumfries Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*).
- CULLYKHAN (8), Banffs; NJ 838 661; I; C-14 age-estimate; Greig 1971 (*Scott Archaeol Forum*, 3, 15-21); Shepherd 1983.
- DALMAHOY (28), Midlothian; NT 135 669; jewellery, metalworking; Stevenson 1949 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 83, 186-98); Alcock 1983.
- DIN EIDYN (29), EDINBURGH, Midlothian; ? Castle Rock; NT 251 735; I, RO; ? or Arthur's Seat (275 728): RR; Annalistic reference: AI s.a.683; Literary reference: *Y Gododdin*.
- DOON HILL (31), East Lothian; NI 686 755; building plans cf Yeavinger; Hope-Taylor 1980; Reynolds 1980; Alcock 1983.
- DUMBARTON ROCK, *ALT CLUT* (27), Dunbartons; NS 400 744; RR: C-14 age-estimates; imported pottery (B, E), glass: annalistic & literary references: *HE* i, 1; i, 12; Alcock & Alcock 1990.
- DUMYAT (24), Stirlings; NS 832 973; defence plan and sequence; RCAHMS 1963, 69-71; Alcock *et al* 1989.
- DUN A'CHOIN DUIBH (61), Argyll; NR 804 640; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1988, 183-4; Alcock *et al* 1989.
- DUN A'CHRANNAG (60), Argyll; NR 727 759; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1988, 169-70; Alcock *et al* 1989, illus 11.6.

- DUNADD (59), Argyll; NR 837 935; RR; imported pottery (D,E), jewellery, metalworking; annalistic references: AI s.a.683, 736; Christison & Anderson 1905; Craw 1930; RCAHMS 1988,149-59; Campbell & Lane 1993.
- DUN AN FHEURAIN (52), Argyll; NM 824 266; RR; bonework; Ritchie 1971; RCAHMS 1975, 82-3.
- DUN ARDTRECK (3), Skye; NG 335 358; I; imported pottery (E); MacKie 1965 (*Proc Prehist Soc*, 31, 93-143).
- DUNBAR (30), East Lothian; NT 678 794; I; timber buildings, coins; historical reference, *VW*, 38: *Dynbaer*; Perry 2000.
- DUN CHONALLAICH (54), Argyll; NM 854 036; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1988, 160-1; Alcock *et al* 1989.
- DUNDURN (18), Perth; NN 708 232; imported pottery (E & ?Carolingian); jewellery, metalworking, glass; annalistic reference, AI s.a. 683: *Dun Duim*; Alcock *et al* 1989.
- DUN FHINN (63), Argyll; NR 657 306; RO; bead; RCAHMS 1971, 83-4.
- DUN MAC SNIACHAN (14), Argyll; NM 903 382; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1975, 68-9; Alcock *et al* 1989, illus 11.4.
- DUNNOTTAR (12), Kincardine; NO 881 838; annalistic references, AI s.a.681, 694 to *Dun Fother*; but excavation at Dunnottar yielded no relevant finds suggesting that 7th-cent site was at Bowduns (NO 885 846); Alcock & Alcock 1992, 267-82.
- DUNOLLIE (50), Argyll; NM 852 314; RR; imported pottery (E), bonework, metalworking, C-14 age-estimates; annalistic references, AI s.a. 686,698, 701, 714, 734: *Dun Ollaigh*; Alcock & Alcock 1987.
- DUNSINANE (20), Perth; NO 213 316; defence sequence, leading to hierarchical plan?; dubious historical reference; Alcock 1981b, 173-4; RCAHMS 1994a, 51-7.
- DUN SKEIG (62), Argyll; NR 757 571; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1971,70-1.
- EAST LOMOND (23), Fife; NO 244 062; Pictish ox plaque; Corrie 1926, 32-4; RCAHMS 1933, 244.
- EILEAN RIGH 1 (55), Argyll; NM 803 021; jewellery, ironwork; RCAHMS 1988,194.
- FORTEVIOT (19), Perth; NO 050 175; Pictish sculpture, ?Class III; square-ditch barrows; historical references, *Scottish Chronicle*, mid-9th cent; Alcock & Alcock 1992, 218-42.
- FRESWICK SANDS BROCH (1), Caithness; ND 382 666; bonework; Anderson 1901 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 35, 143-4); Stevenson 1955.
- GREEN CASTLE, PORTKNOCKIE (7), Banff; NJ 488 687; I; C-14 age estimates; Ralston 1987; Shepherd 1986
- HAREHOPE (34), Peebles; NT 196 445; palisade typology; Feachem 1960; Alcock 1983.
- INCHTUTHILL (16), Perth; NO 119 394; re-used Roman masonry; Abercromby, Ross & Anderson 1902 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 36, 230-4).
- ISLE OF WHITHORN (48), Wigtown; NX 479 362; fortified headland, possible port for Whithorn, which see RCAHMS 1912, 177; Hill 1997, 5.
- KEISS BROCH (2), Caithness; ND 353 611; I,RR; bonework; Anderson 1901,122-7; Stevenson 1955.
- KILDALLOIG (66), Argyll; NR 745 191; imported pottery (E); RCAHMS 1971, 87-8.
- KILDONAN (65), Argyll; NR 780 277; RR; trinkets, C-14 age-estimates; Fairhurst 1939;

- RCAHMS 1971, 88-9; Peltenburg 1982 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 102, 207-8).
- KING'S SEAT, DUNKELD (15), Perth; NO 010 439; place-name [Dunkeld = 'Fort of Caledonii']; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1994a, 51-7.
- KIRK HILL, ST ABB'S (35), Berwick; NT 917 688; C-14 age-estimates; literary references, *HE* iv, 19; iv, 25: *Colodaesburg, Urbs Coludi*; Alcock *et al* 1986.
- LECCAMORE (53), Argyll; NM 750 107; ironwork; RCAHMS 1975, 91-2.
- LINDISFARNE (36), Northumberland; NU 126 418; literary reference, *VW*, chap 36, British \**bronn innis* = 'breast island', referring to the conical Bebloe Hill; Hope-Taylor 1977, 292 with n 340; Jones 1977, 64-6.
- LITTLE DUNAGOIL (67), Bute; NS 084 531; RR; imported pottery (E), bonework, glass; Marshall 1964 (*Trans Buteshire Natur Hist Soc*, 16, 1-69).
- LOCH GLASHAN (58), Argyll; NR 916 925; imported pottery (E), jewellery; RCAHMS 1988, 205-8.
- MILFIELD (38), Northumberland; NT 9533; building typology recognized on air-photos; historical reference, *HE*, ii 14, *Maelmin*; Gates & O'Brien 1988.
- MONCRIEFFE HILL (17), Perth; NO 136 199; ? annalistic reference, AI 728, *bellum Monidchroibh*; defence sequence leading to hierarchical plan ? Feachem 1955; Anderson 1973, 1980, 38; 177; Alcock *et al* 1989.
- MOTE OF MARK (45), Kirkcud; NX 845 540; imported pottery (D,E), bonework, jewellery, metalworking, C-14 estimates; Curle 1914; Alcock 1983; Laing & Longley forthcoming.
- RUBERSLAW (42), Roxburgh; NT 580 155; re-used Roman masonry in defences; Curle 1905, 219-32; RCAHMS 1956 (Roxburghshire), 102-5; Alcock 1979.
- ST ANDREWS (22), Fife; NO 513 166; carved stones; annalistic & literary references, e.g AI s.a.747: *Kinrimond*; Fleming 1931; Anderson 1974b; Henderson 1994.
- SPROUSTON (41), Roxburgh; NT 758 363; building typology recognized on air photos; Smith 1991
- STIRLING (26), Stirlings; NS 790 940; ? literary references, *HE* i, 12; *HB*, chap 64: identifiable with *Giudi*? Jackson 1981 (*Cambridge Medieval Celtic Stud*, 2, 1-7); Alcock 1981b, 175-6.
- THE TORR, SHIELFOOT (10), Argyll; NM 662 701; hierarchical plan; RCAHMS 1980, 88-9.
- TYNRON DOON (43), Dumfries; NX 819 939; jewellery, bonework, iron knife; Williams 1971; Alcock 1983.
- UGADALE (64), Argyll; NR 784 285; metalwork, glass; Fairhurst 1956 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 88, 88-9); RCAHMS 1971, 94.
- URQUHART CASTLE (4), Inverness; NH 530 285; C-14 age-estimates; literary reference, VC 115a: *Airchartdan*; Alcock & Alcock 1992, 242-67
- WHITHORN (49), Wigtowns; NX 444 403; imported pottery (B, D, E), glass, metalworking, C-14 age-estimates, inscribed stones; literary/historical references, *HE* iii, 4; v, 23; *Candida Casa*; RCAHMS 1912, 160 ff; Hill 1997.
- YEAVERING/YEAVERING BELL (39), Northumberland (Y: NT 928 293; YB: NT 9229; Y: building typology; historical reference, *HE* ii 14; *Ad Gefrin*; Hope-Taylor 1977; YB: I, RO; polygonal palisade, cf Doon Hill; Jobey 1966 (*Archaeol Aeliana*, 43, 21-64).

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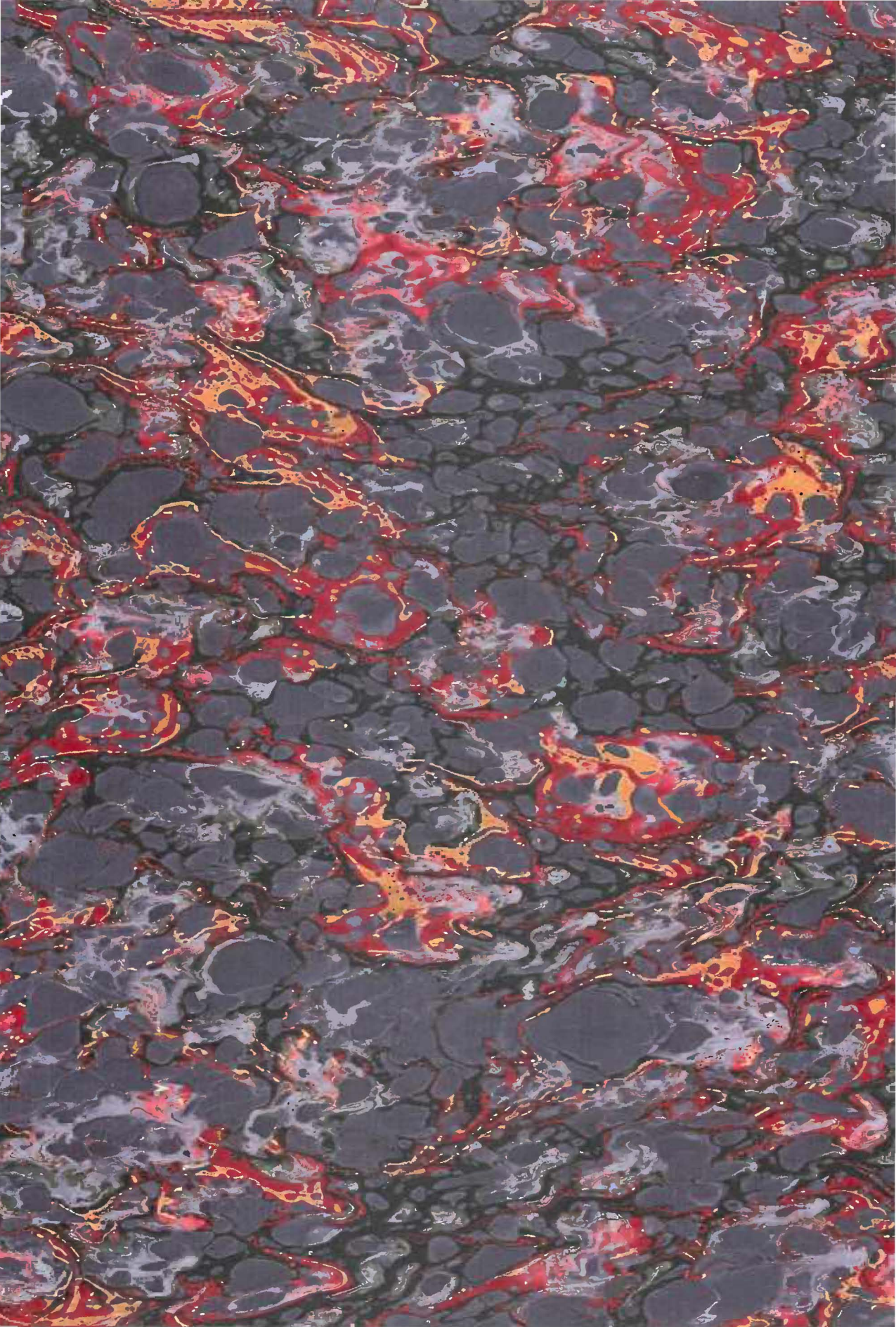
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# KINGS & WARRIORS CRAFTSMEN & PRIESTS

IN NORTHERN BRITAIN AD 550-850

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