

Picts, Saxons and Celtic metalwork

by Lloyd R Laing

PICTISH BEASTS

In the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh there is a bronze buckle from Orkney (FC 157; fig 1/1, pl 11a). The buckle, which has an even green patina, has confronted animal heads at each end of the loop, on either side of the strap bar. On the hoop is impressed linear and dot ornament. The distinctive type of terminals at once suggests its affinities to the well-known series of zoomorphic buckles from late Roman and early post-Roman Britain, which have been discussed at some length and catalogued by Hawkes and Dunning (1961). The type of buckle to which the Orkney example most closely corresponds is Mrs Hawkes' Class IIIA, which she distinguishes as having 'semicircular loops terminating in open-jawed animal heads confronted across the hinge bars' (Hawkes and Dunning 1961, 59). These buckles are rare in Britain – Hawkes and Dunning record only eight examples, all apparently from the south of England and all (with the exception of three chance finds without proper association) from late Roman contexts (1961, 59–60). These, and related buckles, were produced on the Continent in late Roman workshops, and Hawkes suggested that they were brought to Britain by Germanic federates in the fourth and early fifth centuries and were subsequently copied in Britain, believing them to be evidence for Germanic soldiers and settlers in the late Roman period (Hawkes and Dunning 1961, 40–1). Although it is now held that such metalwork enjoyed a wide circulation in the late Roman period, and was not merely used by Germanic soldiers and their families, the IIIA buckles were without doubt of Continental manufacture, as is attested by the finds from Haillot and elsewhere (cf Evison 1965, fig 4/8). Although the Orkney buckle might at first sight appear to be a Continental product, there are reasons for believing it to be a copy. Without exception, the IIIA buckles have animals with open jaws, and the animals on the Orkney piece have closed mouths. Secondly, the prototypes appear to have had metal attachment plates, while the wear striations on the bar of the Orkney buckle suggests it was attached to a leather belt which caused considerable friction. Thirdly, the shape of the animal heads, with snouts and receding chins, is difficult to parallel anywhere among the prototypes, but can be matched in the later but remarkably similar chapes from the St Ninians' Isle treasure (O'Dell *et al* 1959, pl XXXII). What the Orkney brooch represents is a Pictish product probably directly inspired by a IIIA brooch.

Were the confronted animals of the Orkney buckle unique to Pictish metalwork, the similarity between the buckle and the St Ninian's Isle chapes might be regarded as fortuitous. There is, however, a further series of objects from Scotland which have the same device of confronted animals. These are 'swivel rings' – rings with a perforated expansion or ring at right angles to the hoop, through which originally passed a rivet which allowed the ring to pivot freely through 180°. On these swivel rings the swivel is gripped by a pair of confronted animal heads. Of the surviving examples one unprovenanced ring differs slightly from the others (FC 128) in that a penannular

ring with animal terminals is threaded through a loop on the top of an openwork polyhedron (pl 11a). This polyhedron, which has 20 facets, has projecting knobs or bosses at the angles of the facets, the overall effect being one of strapwork. At first sight the object closely resembles the openwork dodecahedrons from Romano-British contexts, such as that from Fishguard, Pembroke (Collingwood and Richmond 1969, pl XXIId). These curious objects have been variously interpreted as candle holders, ornaments and surveyor's instruments, as the opposing pairs of holes are not of equal size but are proportionally related and could be used as sighting instruments (Collingwood and Richmond 1969, 316). This explanation can hardly apply to the Scottish piece, for there is no apparent relationship of this nature between the opposing facets and the object was clearly meant for suspension from its ring in one position only. It is also much smaller than its Roman counterparts. Most probably it is a harness pendant and the remaining swivel rings should be

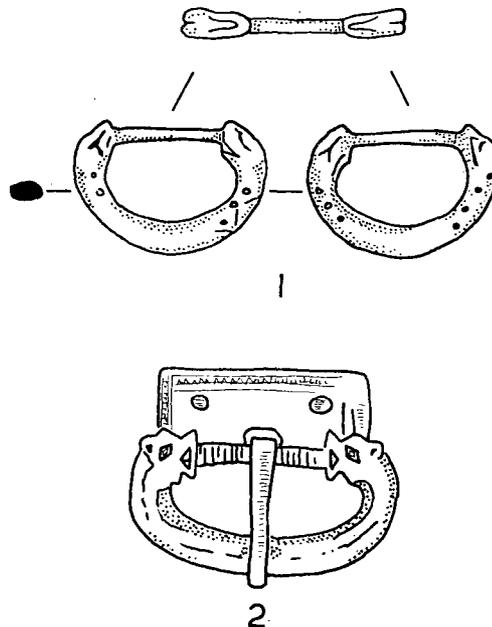


FIG 1 1, bronze buckle from Orkney (FC 157); 2, bronze buckle from Haillet grave XI (after Breuer and Roosens and Evison) (2 : 3)

interpreted as horse fittings which would enable a chain or leather thong to swivel freely without snaring – such rings are of course used in a similar fashion today, for example on dog leads. Openwork consisting of a strap pattern can be seen on the domical mount attached to a pivot ring from the Hill of Fortrie of Balnoon, Inverkeithing, Banff (FC 127) (pl 11a, fig 2/6). There is ample evidence for Pictish horsemanship and for the use of various types of horse harness from Pictish sculpture – horsemen appear, for example, on the Aberlemno Churchyard cross, on a stone from Invergowrie, on the Hilton of Cadboll stone and on some of the Meigle crosses. The Britons of SW Scotland too were horsemen, as is shown by the fragment of a bridle from Mote of Mark, Kirkcudbright (publication pending), a point to be noted since three swivel rings come from Glenluce Sands, Wigtownshire (BH for all three – see fig 2/2, 4, 5). The remaining two examples come from the Hebrides, one from Vallay, North Uist (FC 267) and one from A Chrois, Tiree (FC 266) (fig 2/3, 1).

It is noteworthy that the style of the beast on the Luce Sands rings differs from those on the more northerly finds. The Luce animal-heads are extremely stylised and can reasonably be interpreted as devolved and probably later versions. As the remainder come from areas which are either undoubtedly Pictish or probably Pictish in the fifth to seventh centuries (the period during which the swivel rings were most probably made), it is reasonable to assume that they are products of Pictish workshops, and that the Luce examples are British copies.

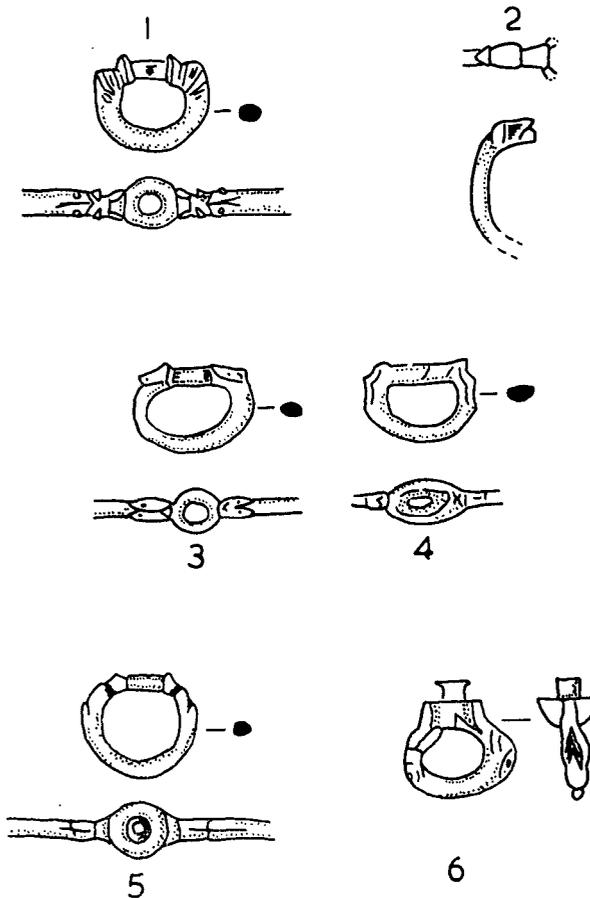


FIG 2 1, ring from A Chrois, Tiree (FC 266); 2, Luce Sands (BH); 3, Vallay, N Uist (FC 267); 4, and 5, Luce Sands (BH); 6, ring of openwork swivel from Fortrie of Balnoon, Banff (FC 127) (2 : 3)

There is no need to evoke a settlement in Pictland of Germanic soldiers of fortune or even a few wandering late Roman soldiers to account for the buckle and the swivel rings. They are products of a general tradition of animal ornamented metalwork current throughout the non-Germanic areas of Britain in the period under review, of which one source of inspiration may have been late Roman metalwork of Vermand type. There are without doubt other sources of inspiration and these can now be considered.

Within the limits of historical Pictland there were two categories of fifth-sixth century

animal-ornamented metalwork. The first class comprises hanging-bowl escutcheons with animal-head attachments, a class represented by the well-known find from Castle Tioram, Inverness (Kilbride-Jones 1937, 208) (fig 3/1). It can immediately be seen that the treatment of the animal head on the Castle Tioram escutcheon is identical to that on certain of the swivel rings – the ears on the Castle Tioram beast are similar in technique to those on the swivel ring from A Chrois. The question of whether the Castle Tioram bowl was made in Pictland or not is taken up below

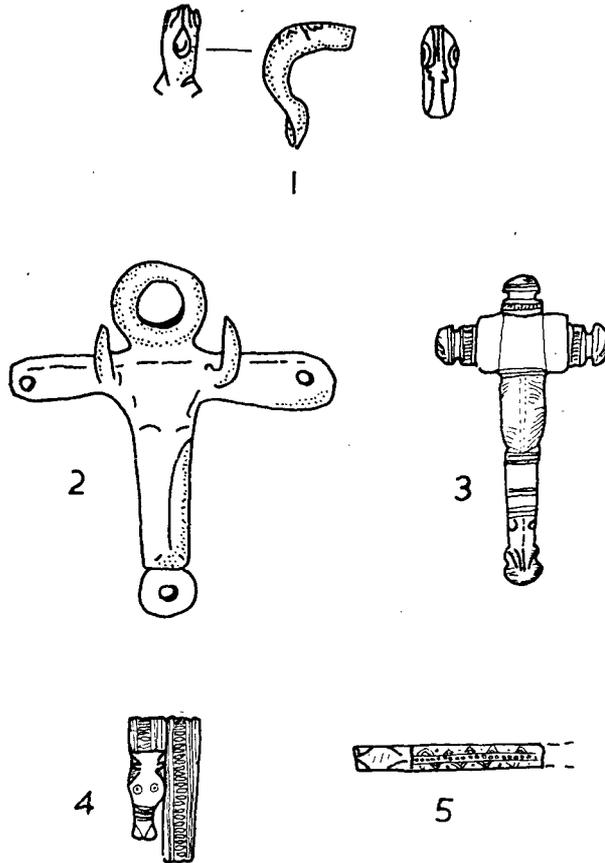


FIG 3 1, escutcheon loop, Castle Tioram, Inverness (after Kilbride-Jones); 2, ox-head bucket escutcheon, Mount Sorrel, Lincs (after Hawkes); 3, cruciform brooch, Malton, Cambs (after Aberg); 4, Anglo-Saxon finger-ring, Guildown, Surrey (after Hawkes); 5, terminal of bracelet, Freestone Hill, Co Kilkenny (after Raftery) (various scales)

(Section II) where it is argued that it was, although it is not necessary to argue a Pictish origin for the bowl to suggest from it that such hanging-bowl animals were known in Pictland, for such beasts were not peculiar to the Castle Tioram bowl but appear as a recurring feature in the hanging-bowl series as a whole (for a convenient series of illustrations, see Kilbride-Jones 1937, fig 4). The second series of animal heads that were available for Pictish copyists comprises the penannular brooches with zoomorphic terminals, which repeat the idea of confronted heads. The most relevant brooches are those of Fowler's Classes E and F (1963, *passim*), the Scottish

examples of which have been conveniently figured by Kilbride-Jones (1936, 124–38). There is no reason to suppose that the E and F brooches are of Pictish origin, though they almost certainly developed in North Britain during the Roman period. Both E and F brooches, however, occur in Pictland, though north of the Forth they are seemingly confined to the Northern Isles (see list in Kilbride-Jones 1936). Fowler, seeking an origin for the animal terminals of the zoomorphic penannulars, drew attention to their similarity to the series of ‘Caledonian’ snake bracelets of Culbin type (1963, 103). This is improbable, for two reasons. First, the Culbin type of bracelet is confined to a limited area, only one example being found S of the Forth, the region in which the E and F brooches developed (Stevenson 1966, 32), and secondly, *pace* Fowler, the E and F brooches are unlikely to have developed before the fourth century, while the Culbin bracelets were almost certainly out of production by the end of the second. The Culbin bracelets and other ‘Caledonian’ metalwork, recently discussed by Simpson (1968), should not however be forgotten in any study of Pictish metalwork origins, for the Caledonians who produced these works were the ancestors of some at least of the historical Picts, and the existence of such a tradition of animal art explains why the Picts were particularly at home with animal motifs at a later date.

The animals of the hanging-bowls almost certainly have a Romano-British origin, like the bowls themselves. Their ancestors are to be sought in the series of ‘bucket animals’ that seem to survive from the pre-Roman Iron Age through Roman Britain into the post-Roman period (Hawkes 1951). Though Fowler suggested that they were a contributing element in the development of fifth and sixth century metalwork (1968, 292), she did not study the direct ancestry of the hanging bowl animals in detail. For the penannular brooches, she has seen as one possible inspiration the ‘Vermand’ type of buckles that it has already been suggested here lie behind the Orkney buckle, and has also seen the buckles of Class I and IIA (i.e. the imported classes) as being a possible source of inspiration for the Pictish S-dragon (Fowler 1963, 131).

There is another source of inspiration for the confronted animal heads of Late Celtic art. This is the series of Roman bracelets that were manufactured widely in the northern provinces. They occur at Vermand, and in Britain at sites such as Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943, 286) and Cirencester (*British Museum Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, 1951, 14 and fig 7/7). At Maiden Castle they appear to belong to the fourth century, and they occur in a similar period at Dinorben, Gwynedd (Gardner and Savory 1964, 139) and more significantly, at Freestone Hill, Co Kilkenny (Raftery 1969, 62), where one of the bracelets (E61. 4, fig 19) has a terminal very reminiscent of a Class F brooch. Such bracelets seem to have remained popular into Anglo-Saxon times in England, and occur in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Saffron Walden, Essex (Brown 1915, 458 and fig 17), while a related finger ring with a distinct horse’s head has been illustrated by Hawkes from Guilsdown (Hawkes S C 1961, 49 and fig 10). The occurrence of such bracelets in a native context in Ireland shows that they were reaching the Celtic West in the late Roman period.

Lastly another source for Pictish beasts may be suggested. This is the series of Frankish S-brooches which imitate Lombard prototypes, some of which have recently been studied by Werner (1961). Although only a few actual imports of these brooches are known from England, in Anglo-Saxon contexts, such as that from Iffley, Oxford (Aberg 1926, fig 165), a few apparently reached the Celtic West, for a close copy of one in the form of a tinned bronze mount is among the finds from the Early Christian village at Ronaldsway, Isle of Man (Neely 1940, pl XIII, 2/2) and will shortly be published in full by the writer. This mount is in the form of a double headed S-dragon with open jaws, reminiscent of the open jaws of the beasts on the swivel ring from Inverkeithing, or the S-dragons that confront each other on the escutcheon of the hanging bowl from Faversham, Kent (conveniently figured by Leeds 1936, fig 1), and which may itself be a Pictish product (fig 4/2).

From the foregoing, it is clear that in late Roman Britain and in the early post-Roman period a variety of traditions of animal motifs was being used in metalwork, and that some at least of these sources were available in Pictland. It is to these beasts, rather than to any tradition of Eurasiatic animal art, as Thomas postulated (1961, 57), that we should look for the ancestors of the Pictish 'swimming elephant' and his other sculptural fellows, as well as to later manifestations of confronted animals in Pictish metalwork.



1

FIG 4 1, tinned bronze mount from Ronaldsway, Isle of Man (2 : 3); 2, escutcheon from Faversham, Kent (much reduced)



2

PICTISH HANGING BOWLS?

Among the finds from consolidation work by the then Ministry of Works at Aberdour Castle, Fife, now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, is a large fragment of a circular enamelled mount (FC 298). Its provenance tells us little – the earliest work at Aberdour dates from the fourteenth century and there is no tradition of an early Christian period occupation of the site, though the place-name itself is possibly Pictish and there are well-known finds of Pictish sculpture from the area. The mount itself is 48 mm in diameter and is slightly convex. The design originally consisted of four panels round a central roundel containing a cross with armpits and curvilinear nimbus. Only two panels survive, one containing single-strand interlace, the other containing a more complex interlaced pattern, forming a crouching animal. The background enamel is now cream, with yellow enamel in the panel borders (pl 11b).

Size and convexity show that it is the base escutcheon from the inside of a bowl and as such it fits into the general series of Late Celtic hanging-bowl escutcheons. It has, however, no precise parallels in the hanging-bowl series, though its use of enamel and interlace puts it into an amorphous group of late bowls with escutcheons displaying this type of ornament. Of these, an escutcheon from Whitby, Yorkshire, is closely related (Peers and Radford 1943, pl XXVI, c) in technique, while the interlace can be compared closely both in technique and design to that on the bird escutcheon from Ferns, Co Wexford (Henry 1936, pl XXXVIII; Mahr 1932, pl 40-4; Henry 1965, 104), where the enamel is combined with millefiori. The Ferns piece Henry has grouped, I think correctly, along with a series of objects including the Clonmacnois escutcheon, the Ashmolean bird mount, and the Ekerö crozier which because of their use of both enamel and millefiori should be dated before 880 rather than after it. Also into this general category of miscellaneous pieces of metalwork can be placed the Mikelbostad and Hoprekstad bowls and at the end of the series the Moylough belt shrine and possibly the Oseberg bucket mount (Henry 1965, 104-5). Apart from the Ferns escutcheon, however, there is no single piece of metalwork

from Ireland that can be closely compared with the Aberdour escutcheon, and the cross in the centre with its curvilinear nimbus is far more in keeping with the traditions of Pictish crosses than those from Ireland, though it has no precise counterpart in either case.

If it cannot be matched in Ireland, is there any case for believing the Aberdour escutcheon to have been a product of Pictland, apart from the obvious fact of its Pictish provenance?

There is now no obstacle against believing that some hanging bowls were made in Pictland. The find of a mould for a hanging-bowl escutcheon from the Pictish fort at Craig Phadrig, Inverness (Small 1972, 49–51) shows that some bowls with openwork escutcheons of double-pelta type were being produced in Pictland, and there is no reason for not supposing that the Castle Tioram bowl and possibly the Tummel Bridge, Perth, bowl were not of Pictish manufacture. A small base escutcheon is among the unpublished finds from another Pictish fort, at Clatchard Craig, Fife, where the ornament is of the triskele type to be found on a large series of bowls (for illustrations of several, Henry 1936, pls XXXII–III) with enamelled escutcheons. What may be the lead die for a mould for one of these escutcheons is among the unpublished finds from the Pictish metalworking site at Birsay, Orkney, which I am grateful to Mrs C Curle for allowing me to cite (see below, pp 301–7).

The Picts, then, made hanging bowls. Apart from these certainly Pictish examples, there is a group of bowls which are linked by technique. These bowls all have escutcheons in which the enamel is broken up by very thin lines of metal, and into this class fall the escutcheons on the Baginton bowl, the Lullingstone bowl and the Hildersham bowl. All three bowls, in contrast to others of similar type, use base escutcheons inside and underneath the bowl, and both the Lullingstone and Hildersham bowls have in their decorative repertoire naturalistic animals in the Pictish tradition. This fact has of course long been recognised. Clapham suggested the Lullingstone bowl might be of Pictish inspiration (1934, 43–5), while Fowler has demonstrated that the Hildersham bowl has similar animal ornament (1968, 302) and has pointed out the similar technique used on all three (1968, 294). Although in 1968 it was not possible to prove hanging bowls were made in Pictland, Fowler's arguments for Pictish influence can now be translated as Pictish manufacture.

The Aberdour escutcheon is executed in the same technique as the three bowls, very thin lines separating areas of enamel. The simple interlace has its counterparts on several Class II Pictish stones, for example on the borders of Meigle no. 5 (Cruden 1964, pl 39). The second panel of ornament is difficult to reconstruct, due to corrosion, but would appear to be an animal in crouched position with open mouth and lolling tongue. Beasts with lolling tongues are by no means unknown in Pictish art, as for instance on the Dunfallandy stone (Cruden 1964, pl 11), or from the back of the Invergowrie stone (Cruden 1964, pl 16). For a far closer parallel, however, to the ornament as a whole one need look no further than bowl no. 4 from the St Ninian's Isle treasure which provides a parallel for the interlace and bowl 2 which provides a similar type of animal with extended forepaw, lolling tongue, convoluted hindquarters and knotwork, or the beasts on the pommel (O'Dell *et al* 1959, fig 6, pl XXVIa, b). The technique of the Aberdour escutcheon is simple, but the style is related.

THREE PENANNULAR BROOCHES

Among a collection of finds from N Uist recently presented to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland are three penannular brooches. The first (GT 962) is of tinned bronze and has square terminals with an incuse diamond on each in which are three raised dots. The pin has a lentoid head and is decorated with hatching (fig 5/1). This brooch belongs to a well-known class,

designated by Fowler as G (1963, 107-9). Moulds for brooches of this type are known from Mote of Mark and Dunadd, and they are generally held to belong to the fifth-sixth centuries, though there is a late, silver example from Trewhiddle, Cornwall, in a ninth-century hoard of Anglo-Saxon metalwork (Blunt and Wilson 1961, pl XXVIIIb). It is not, however, the first Class G penannular from the Hebrides. Another, very closely comparable, is in the Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery, among unpublished finds from the Ludovic Mann collection. It is reputed to have

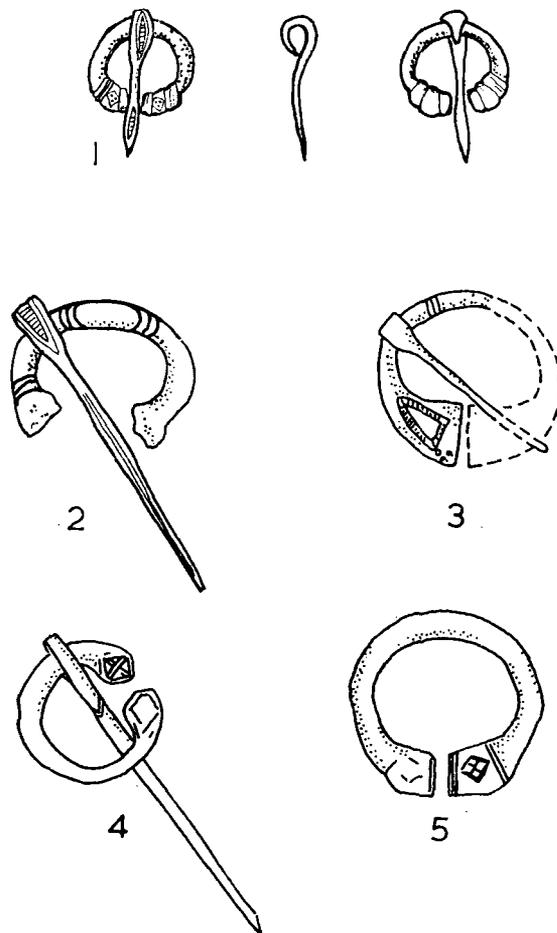


FIG 5 Penannular brooches. 1-3, S Uist; 4, W Scotland; 5, Balevullin, Tiree (2 : 3)

been found in Tiree, at Balevullin, and a second similar brooch is in the same collection and has presumably come from Western Scotland (cf Scottish Exhibition of National History Art and Industry Catalogue of Exhibits, *Palace of History*, (1911), II, 868, no. 9) (fig 5/4, 5). A third Class G penannular has been published from Skye by Simpson (1953). The remaining class G brooches are from Castlehill, Dalry, Ayrshire, Dowalton Loch, Wigtownshire. Fowler has suggested that the brooches with grooving on the ends, into which category the Trewhiddle, Skye and N Uist brooches fall, are late (eighth-ninth centuries) and the others are early, but this is difficult to substantiate, and the use of a lentoid pin with the N Uist brooch, which is a typologically early

device, might suggest an earlier rather than a later date (Fowler 1963, 109). The lentoid pin raises another important question, for the type is that which has been associated with Pictish penannulars, and is used on the St Ninian's Isle brooches. Both a lentoid pin and a panel on the hoop distinguish the second S Uist brooch as a Pictish product (GT 961). This brooch (fig 5/2) has damaged terminals, and all that can be said from the existing flattened portions is that the brooch belongs to Class H, that is, those with expanded, flattened terminals. More information is provided by the third brooch from the collection (GT 960), which is half of a Class H brooch with characteristic terminals, on which there is an inner panel indicated by a border of hatching. There are two incised lines on the hoop (fig 5/3), and the pin is of lentoid type.

The interest of these brooches lies in the fact that they are fifth-sixth century types, all of which are known to have been in production in SW Scotland at the Mote of Mark, but which in the Hebrides display certain features associated with the Pictish penannular-brooch series. They are tangible evidence that the starting point for Pictish penannulars is to be found in the sixth-century metalwork of lowland Scotland.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX

Pictish beads

In view of the scarcity of type fossils for recognising the Picts in an archaeological context, any object which can be established as a distinctive product of Pictland is of particular interest. One category of object which hitherto does not seem to have been recognised as a Pictish product is a type of glass bead in yellow and black, the ornament comprising yellow spirals on a black ground. The Pictish examples may be either bun-shaped or triangular with rounded angles – the only incidence, as far as I am aware, of triangular glass beads in the Early Christian period (fig 6).



FIG 6 Bead from the Culbin Sands, Moray (1 : 1)

As a type these beads belong to a common class of cable beads, that is, beads made from one or more cable of glass twisted together. The technique is a common one, and occurs as early as the pre-Roman Iron Age at Meare, Somerset (Bulleid 1926, pl XIV, 6) and can be seen in Scotland in the Roman period at Newstead (Curle 1911, pl XCI, 5, 20). Although they occur in a wide variety of post-Roman Migration period contexts in Europe from the fifth century to the ninth or tenth, they are particularly common in Ireland – so common, in fact, for it to have been suggested that many of the Continental finds are of Irish manufacture (Hencken 1950, 137). The closest parallels in Ireland to the Pictish beads are two among the old finds at Lagore, Co Meath,

which are roundish and have yellow spirals on a clear glass ground (Hencken 1950, 144 and fig 67, A)

Apart from their general similarity to the Lagore beads, the yellow spiral beads from Scotland can be dated to the Pictish period because of the association of a fragment of one from the Croy Hoard, Inverness, associated with Pictish-type penannular-brooch fragments, amber beads, a portion of a bronze balance and two Anglo-Saxon pennies, which dated the deposition of the find to c 850 (Blunt 1950, 217). Two other beads have been found in the Pictish fort of Burghead, Moray.

The distribution of the beads is particularly interesting, as it appears to be concentrated in the present county of Aberdeenshire, with a few outliers in adjacent counties. The following list is based on the collection in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, and makes no claims to completion, but I believe is sufficiently complete to reflect accurately the distribution.

FJ 1-4, Cawdor, Nairn; FJ 5-6, Burghead, Moray; FJ 7-8, Coldstone, Aberdeenshire; FJ 9, Blelack, Aberdeenshire; FJ 10, Slains, Aberdeenshire; FJ 11, Nairnshire, unprovenanced; FJ 12, Unprovenanced; FJ 13, Clova, Aberdeenshire; FJ 14, Beetloun, Aberdeenshire; FJ 15, Aberdeenshire, unprovenanced; FJ 64, Birse, Aberdeenshire; FJ 65, Tough, Aberdeenshire; FJ 66, Strathdon, Aberdeenshire; FJ 67, Midmar, Aberdeenshire; FJ 68, Ballogie, Aberdeenshire; FJ 69, Kinnord, Aberdeenshire; FJ 84, Unprovenanced; FJ 136, Buck of Carbrach, Aberdeenshire; FJ 137, Glenbuchat, Aberdeenshire; FJ 138, Callievar Hill, Cushnie, Aberdeenshire.

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a Bronze buckle from Orkney, zoomorphic bronze swivel ring from Inverkeithing, Banff and bronze polyhedron with zoomorphic suspension loop from Scotland (1:1)



b Enamelled bronze escutcheon from Aberdour, Fife (2:1)

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