

The iconography of the Hunterston brooch and related early medieval material

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights a new aspect of the design and iconographical programme of the Hunterston brooch. Animals embedded in the form of the brooch terminals flank the cross panel, and are interpreted as a motif rooted in the Cantic of Habakkuk's assertion that Christ would be recognised between two living things. This Old Testament text was given wide meaning by early Christian thinkers, encompassing the central concept of the recognition, the 'knowing', of Christ and thus can be regarded as a fundamentally important subject for expression. Visual expressions of this theme are more prevalent than has been recognised, and occur in different variations across media. Objects that feature the motif include those usually identified as secular metalwork such as brooches, as well as church objects and Christian sculpture. Many expressions of the motif, including those on the Hunterston and 'Tara' brooches, do not feature figurative depictions of Christ. Instead – and in common with Pictish sculpture (but in contrast to Anglo-Saxon and Irish sculpture) – a symbol such as the cross or lozenge is used to represent Christ. It is suggested that the depiction of such a central Christian theme might lie behind the motivation to 'close the gap' between the terminals of the Hunterston and 'Tara' brooches. If so, this adaptation would provide a way to depict the motif which simultaneously maintained a visual link with the traditional brooch form whilst highlighting the 'new' Christian element precisely because it was what was added.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore the iconography of a group of early medieval brooches, with a focus on the Hunterston brooch (National Museums Scotland, FC 8) (illus 1).¹ Here I am building on the firm foundation laid by R B K Stevenson (Stevenson 1974; 1983). Stevenson summarised the iconographic programme of the Hunterston brooch as a procession of animals flanking a central Christian cross (Stevenson 1974: 39).

This zoomorphic procession starts at the top of the hoop, where the filigree animals are orientated towards viewers of the brooch. The procession faces away from the centre, running around each side of the hoop so that the animals that flank the cross-bearing panel at the base are orientated towards the wearer of the brooch. Stevenson supported the reading of the amber insets on the central 'closing' panel of the brooch as a Christian cross and described the brooch design in the following terms:

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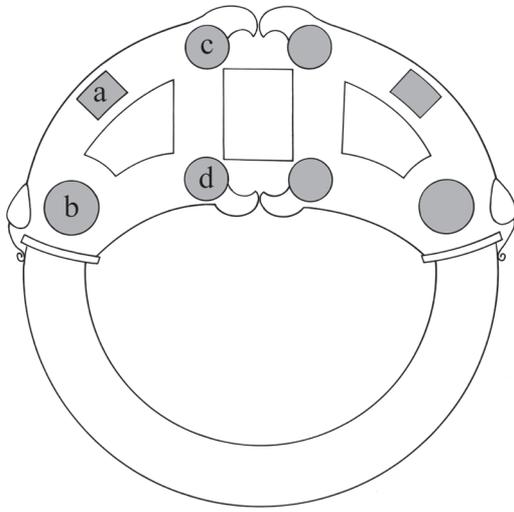


ILLUS 1 The Hunterston brooch (© Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

The programme of the design then appears to be a central cross flanked by the Creatures: a procession of beasts all of which look towards it, two birds at the sides, and various fish-snakes most of which do the same; surrounded too by the four eagle heads, arranged perhaps to protect it, but also pecking in pairs at the two golden bosses now missing or damaged; creatures eating the fruit of life as in the inhabited vine-scrolls with which we are familiar (Stevenson 1974: 39).

He cited a comparison made originally by Elbern (Elbern 1961), between the Hunterston

brooch and a Frankish reliquary that features beasts, birds and snakes – the Creatures of Genesis – surrounding the crucified Christ. Stevenson supported the comparison, suggesting the beasts, bird-heads and snakes with fish tails on the Hunterston brooch should have the same Christian significance (Stevenson 1974: 39). This paper builds on these observations and suggests a further iconographic element to the programme of the Hunterston and related brooches which



ILLUS 2 The Hunterston brooch showing embedded animal design: (a) eye; (b) ear or cheek; (c) upper jaw; (d) lower jaw (drawn by Marion O’Neil; © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

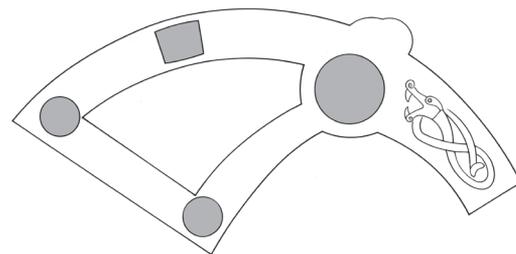
may also be identified on sculpture and some ecclesiastical metalwork.

THE HUNTERSTON, ‘TARA’ AND DUNBEATH BROOCHES

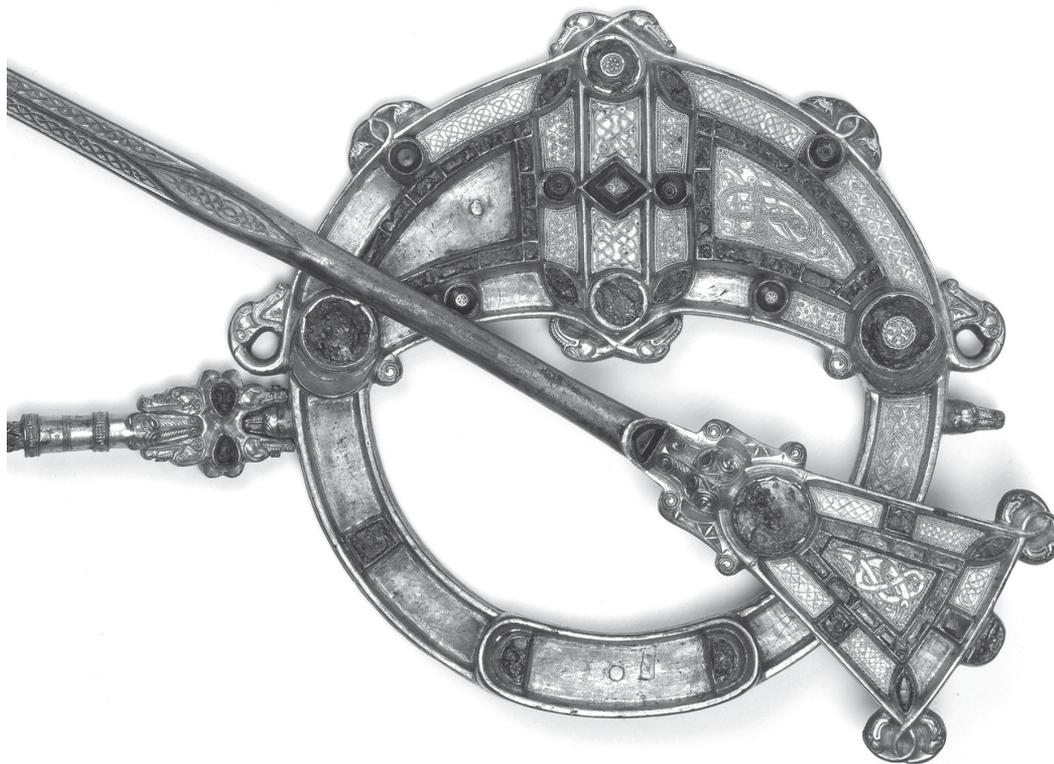
The decoration of the fronts of the Hunterston and ‘Tara’ brooches (National Museum of Ireland, R4015) and the Dunbeath brooch terminal (National Museums Scotland, FC 9) feature extensive zoomorphic filigree. However, beyond this extensive use of overt and recognised animal-based decoration there is a further zoomorphic aspect to these three brooches: the form of the brooch terminals themselves can be seen as abstract animals. This is achieved by the placement of decorative amber insets (illus 2), picking out the key features of eye (a), ear or cheek (b), and the top (c) and bottom (d) of an open jaw. What have usually been interpreted as stylised eagles’ beaks on the Hunterston brooch can

also be seen as representing the beasts’ teeth. These beasts embedded in the design of the brooch terminal flank (and perhaps strive to bite) the central cross panel. The design of these abstract embedded animals echoes those of the tiny gold filigree beasts that adorn the front surface of the brooch. Early medieval penannular and pseudo-penannular brooches are generally assumed to have been worn with the terminals at the bottom. If this is correct, both the beasts embedded in the brooch form and the filigree beasts that decorate the brooch terminals would appear upside down to a viewing audience; instead they would be orientated so as to make sense to a downward glance by the wearer of the brooch. Alternatively, we may be wrong in assuming that all brooches were worn in this way: perhaps some were originally intended to be worn with the terminals pointing upwards towards the wearer’s shoulder or head. All the illustrations of brooches in this paper are orientated with the terminals pointing upwards so as to make the embedded beasts as clear as possible to the reader.

The closest correspondence between a filigree animal and the abstract terminal beast is found on the Dunbeath brooch terminal: the head of the filigree animal on the brooch hoop



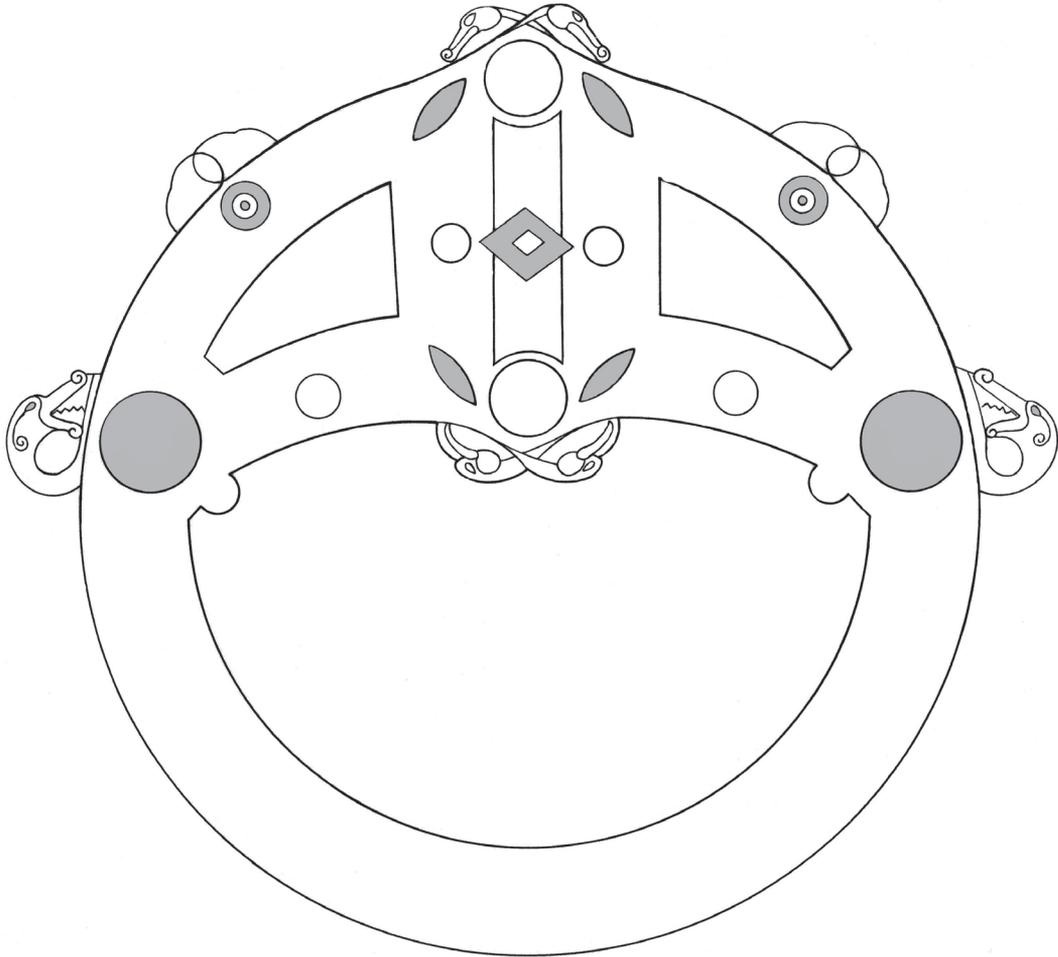
ILLUS 3 The Dunbeath brooch terminal showing embedded animal design and adjacent zoomorphic filigree (drawn by Marion O’Neil; © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)



ILLUS 4 The 'Tara' brooch (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland)

immediately adjacent to the terminal mirrors closely the design of beast embedded in the terminal design (illus 3). On the 'Tara' brooch (illus 4 & 5) it is the three-dimensional beasts on the edge of the brooch, between terminals and hoop, that mirror the design of the beasts embedded in the terminal design. Here, the curled lips of the three-dimensional beast are reflected in the lentoid amber insets on the terminal; the spiral on the beast's cheek by the large circular inset at the junction between hoop and terminal; the hatching running along the edges of the open jaw by the narrow border of amber insets on the terminal. The eye of the beast embedded in the brooch terminal is distinguished from other insets not by its size but by the use of two colours – the surviving eye is a blue stud inlaid with a red ring to

represent an iris with a central blue pupil. The use of a glass inset with an inlaid glass ring in a contrasting colour produces a distinctive effect (the circular amber studs on the 'Tara' brooch feature central gold sheet and filigree mounts, but the effect is quite different). It is a feature only rarely found in insular art: the only other objects with this particular kind of two-colour inset known to the author appear on one of the St Ninian's Isle chapes (National Museums Scotland, FC 103; Small et al 1973: 65–7, no 16; Youngs 1989: 110, colour pl 154, no 103; the eye inset is most clearly visible in Clarke 2008: 18) and on the Sutton Hoo purselid (Bruce-Mitford 1978: 487–522, pl 14). Both of these parallels feature the combination of blue and red in common with the 'Tara' brooch, and significantly on both,



ILLUS 5 The 'Tara' brooch showing embedded animal design (drawn by Marion O'Neil; © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

it is used to depict the eyes on what are very clearly identifiable animals (a beast on the chape and a bird of prey on the purse lid): this provides support for the reading of beasts' heads embedded within the design of the 'Tara' brooch itself.

The form and position of the beasts inherent in the form of the Hunterston, 'Tara' and Dunbeath brooches bring to mind the explicitly animal-shaped terminals of one of the brooches from the St Ninian's Isle hoard

(National Museums Scotland FC 295; Small et al 1973: 79, no 79; Youngs 1989: 112, no 107) (illus 6) and a similar fragment from Freswick (Henderson & Henderson 2004: 99, fig 136). Like the explicit animal filigree and the implicit beasts embedded in the terminals of the Hunterston and related brooches, the beasts on the St Ninian's Isle and Freswick brooches are also orientated towards the brooch wearer.² Unlike the Hunterston and 'Tara' brooches, the St Ninian's Isle and

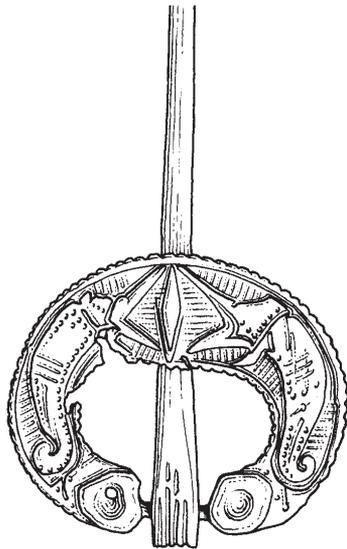


ILLUS 6 Brooch from the St Ninian's Isle hoard, Shetland, with animal-head terminals (© Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

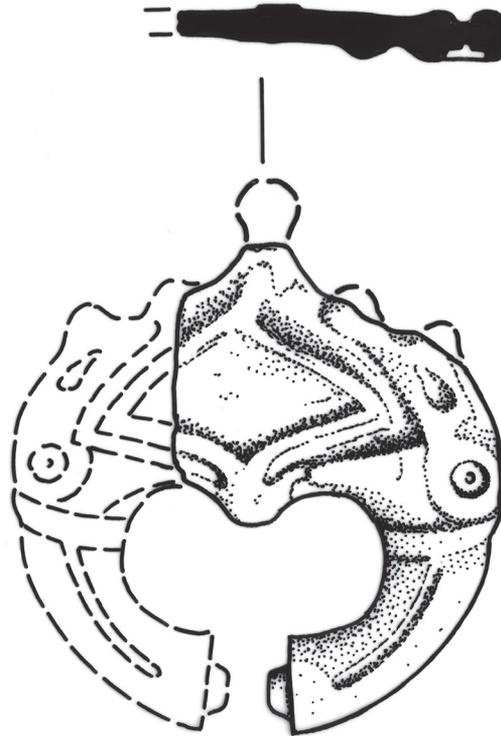
in the terminals of the Hunterston and related brooches and can be seen as a later development. Their design consists of a pair of opposed beasts reaching around the annular hoop, mirroring the position of the animals implicit in the design of the Hunterston terminals but without the additional animal-based decoration represented by the filigree work on the Hunterston, 'Tara' and Dunbeath brooches. On the Armoy ring-headed pin (British Museum, Prehistory and Europe 1898,0618.21) (illus 7) and on a fragment of a similar brooch from excavations at Birnie (Moray) (Hunter 2007: figs 27 and 30, 37–8) (illus 8) the animal heads reach towards a lozenge shape.³ This layout is paralleled on

Freswick examples are 'true' penannular brooches, and therefore maintain the gap between the animal-shaped terminals.

Several ring-headed pins also provide a good parallel for the beasts embedded



ILLUS 7 Ring-headed pin from Armoy (by permission of Oxford University Press, reproduced from Bruce-Mitford 2005: fig 764)



ILLUS 8 Reconstruction of the ring-headed pin fragment from Birnie (drawn by Alan Braby; © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)



ILLUS 9 Ring-headed brooch from Grousehall (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland)

the ‘Tara’ brooch, where the implicit animals embedded in the brooch terminals reach towards a small lozenge-shaped inset of amber on the central ‘closing’ panel. The Christian meaning of the lozenge has been debated but a clear case supporting such a reading has been made by Jennifer O’Reilly (O’Reilly 1998), and, in Hilary Richardson’s words, the lozenge can be read as standing for ‘Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos’ (Richardson

1984: 32). Richardson argued that Tara’s lozenge should be read as part of the brooch’s Christian decorative scheme and compared it to prominent lozenges on early medieval Irish sculpture, for instance, on the cross of Moone, Co. Kildare (Richardson 1996: 24). The lozenge inset on the ‘Tara’ brooch would originally have been elaborated with five tiny gold pellets, four arranged as a cross around the fifth, central, pellet (Stevenson 1983: 470). This strengthens both the interpretation of the lozenge as a Christian symbol in this context and the visual comparison with the Hunterston brooch and its central cross-bearing panel.

On a ring-headed pin from Grousehall, Co. Donegal (illus 9), a pair of explicit beasts, their eyes clearly indicated by amber insets, reach towards a human head (National Museum of Ireland 1931: 16; Ó Floinn in Youngs 1989: 105, no 91). This has been compared to a similar juxtaposition of a human head (identified as Christ) between a pair of beasts on a shrine crest from Killua Castle (illus 10) (Ó Floinn in Youngs 1989: 105). Interestingly, Christ is portrayed on the shrine crest with a markedly lozenge-shaped head, reiterating



ILLUS 10 Killua Castle shrine crest (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland)

the symbolic links between this naturalistic depiction and what will be suggested as a more abstract version of the same motif on, for instance, the Armoy pin. Finally, a brooch fragment from Norway (Bourke, Fanning & Whitfield 1988) may also depict a variation on this motif, albeit on the pin head rather than placed within the erstwhile gap between terminals. On this cruciform piece from a composite pin-head, a human mask, suggested as Christ, is framed by two bird heads.

DISCUSSION

It is proposed that the Hunterston and ‘Tara’ brooches, as well as the ring-headed pins from Armoy, Birnie and Grousehall, all feature variations on the same motif: opposed beasts (inherent in the brooch design or explicit in its decoration) that flank a central element of cross, lozenge or figure. While it is arguable that the motif in this context can be interpreted as a visual representation of a central Christian theme, it is clear that it has roots in rich and very long-lived decorative traditions. Opposed beasts were part of the La Tène repertoire and occur frequently among the decoration of Late Roman and pre-Viking Scandinavian metalwork (a selection of which are neatly illustrated together in Webster 2003: figure 1). The combination of opposed beasts and a central figure is prominent among high status pre-Viking Scandinavian metalwork, as evident among the dies and resulting decorative plaques used to decorate helmets; from the cusp of the conversion to Christianity (in England), the motif occurs repeatedly at Sutton Hoo among the helmet foils and on the cloisonné purse lid (already mentioned in the context of two-tone red and blue eyes on the ‘Tara’ brooch; see Bruce-Mitford 1978 for both Sutton Hoo and comparative Scandinavian material). This motif has been

linked to the development of Christian Daniel imagery among Burgundian buckles from the late 6th century and its ready acceptance during the conversion ‘implies a Germanic myth or ritual whose depiction was easily adapted to Christian iconography’ (Mac Lean 1986: 178). In writing about Anglo-Saxon art, Leslie Webster too has highlighted a visual grammar and vocabulary rooted in the pagan world view that was used to ‘restate and reframe’ Christian iconography into ‘formats more consistent with established traditions of Anglo-Saxon visual literacy’ (Webster 2003: 13). Similar processes are apparent within Insular art – for instance, the local adaptation of spiral-based designs and Pictish symbols on Christian (class II) Pictish sculpture. The flanking beasts on the Hunterston and ‘Tara’ brooches can be seen as a local rendering of an originally pagan motif that was being widely adopted and adapted in the art of western Christendom. In this case, the motif has been combined with a pre-existing tradition of depicting animal heads on the terminals of penannular brooches, as seen in the enamelled zoomorphic series of brooches (Fowler’s type F, Fowler 1960).

The beasts that flank cross, lozenge or figure on the brooches can be interpreted as part of a Christian iconographic programme. Although the motif of the figure flanked by beasts has been linked with imagery of Daniel in the lion’s den, I suggest that in the case of the Hunterston and related brooches, a more appropriate interpretation lies in the recognition of Christ by two living things, as described in the Old Testament Canticle of Habakkuk (3:1–19): *In medio duorum animalium innotesceris* (‘You will be known in the midst of two animals’). The significance of this theme of ‘Christ acclaimed between two beasts’ has been explored thoroughly by Éamonn Ó Carragáin, particularly with reference to visual expressions on the

Ruthwell and Bewcastle sculptured crosses (Ó Carragáin 1986; 1994; 2005: 201–8). Since his first discussion in 1986 and Lucas' independent discussion in 1987, the identification of visual expressions of this theme within Insular art have become more frequent: 'a hitherto unnoticed, and apparently widespread, Christian iconographical theme has thus emerged in scholarship within the last twenty years' (Bailey 2011: 244). Among the early suggestions of instances of this motif among insular metalwork are the pin-head fragment from Norway (Bourke, Fanning & Whitfield 1988) and the Killua Castle shrine mount (Ryan in Youngs 1989: 143–4, no 137), mentioned above, in which Christ is represented by a human head. Bailey has noted that among more recent identifications of this motif are instances where the central element is not figural but rather symbolic – for instance, a cross or triquetra (Bailey 2011: 244).

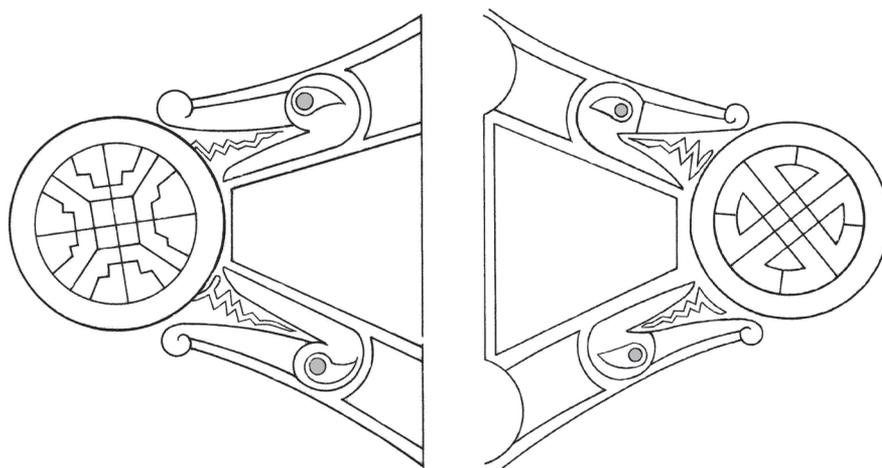
The Canticle of Habakkuk would have been very familiar to an early Christian monastic audience; it was chanted every Friday, and together with Psalm 90/91 (You will walk on the asp and the basilisk, and tread down the lion and the dragon) it played an important role in commemorating Christ's death at the ninth hour of Good Friday (Ó Carragáin 1994: 422). While the Ruthwell and Bewcastle panels present a fairly literal rendition of the recognition of Christ by two animals – a figural representation of Christ literally stands on two benevolent creatures whose paws form a cross to make their recognition of the identity of Christ unmistakable – early Christian commentary interpreted the 'two animals' phrase more widely, to include a variety of ways in which Christ was revealed between two figures (Ó Carragáin 1994: 422). Bede, for instance, related the Canticle of Habakkuk to two events in Christ's life when he was recognised, not

by animals but by people: the Transfiguration whereby Christ was made known between Moses and Elijah; and the Crucifixion where he was revealed between the two thieves. As Éamonn Ó Carragáin neatly concludes: 'It is clear from both Jerome's and Bede's commentaries that the flanking *animalia* could, for a monastic audience, take on a vast variety of human, animal, inanimate, abstract or angelic forms' (Ó Carragáin 1994: 423). Bailey's recent review has addressed some underlying concerns about the familiarity and interpretation of this concept among an 8th-century Anglo-Saxon monastic audience (Bailey 2011). There is therefore a strong basis on which to interpret the 'two animals' phrase as standing for the wider and crucial concept of the recognition of Christ, and the variety in depiction means we cannot expect visual expressions of the concept to conform to the model provided by the Ruthwell and Bewcastle panels.

The suggested expressions of this motif on the brooches and pins discussed above certainly differ from those on the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses and this, combined with their appearance on what are usually regarded primarily as 'secular' objects, might require evidence in support of such an interpretation. Similar renderings of the motif can be identified on church metalwork such as the Moylough belt shrine and the Monymusk reliquary (in addition to the bell-shrine mentioned above), and these examples can be cited in support of a Christian interpretation of the motif. In common with the brooches described above, on the Moylough belt shrine and Monymusk reliquary the motif is rendered using symbols to represent Christ rather than figural depiction. On the Moylough belt shrine (illus 11), two pairs of open-mouth beasts each reach towards an inlaid glass stud – both studs feature cross-based designs, one a saltire cross with a lozenge at the centre (illus 12).



ILLUS 11 Moylough belt shrine (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland)



ILLUS 12 Detail of the Moylough belt shrine highlighting animal ornament (drawn by Marion O'Neil; © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

O'Kelly originally suggested that these paired beasts might represent Daniel in the lion's den (O'Kelly 1965), but Lucas later drew attention to Habakkuk's description of Christ between two living things and suggested it as an alternative interpretation (Lucas 1987: 94–6). The crosses inlaid into the Moylough glass studs certainly chime with the use of the cross as a symbolic (rather than literal, figural) representation of Christ on the Hunterston brooch; versions of this motif that feature a central cross or lozenge are clearly referencing Christ rather than Daniel, and it makes sense to read the (otherwise very similar) versions with a figural element in the same way.

On the Monymusk reliquary, the roof-bar (illus 13) terminates in a pair of inward-facing birds which are passive in demeanour, unlike the somewhat menacing Moylough beasts. They gaze towards, but are necessarily at some distance from, the cross first identified by Stevenson in the reserve of the central interlace panel (Stevenson 1983: 473–4). Finally, a sculptural parallel can also be provided with confidence: Ó Carragáin drew attention to the pair of beasts that crouch underneath Paul and Anthony on the Nigg cross-slab, flanking what he identified as a chalice, and positioned immediately below the scene of the breaking of the bread. He suggested the beasts

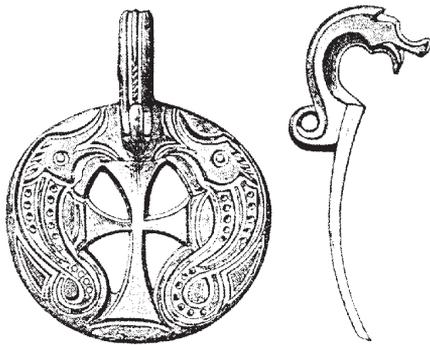


ILLUS 13 The Monymusk reliquary roof bar (after Stevenson 1983)

offer a further expression of the Cantic of Habakkuk, and that they ‘contemplate ... the heavenly bread and the chalice through which Christ is known’ (Ó Carragáin 1994: 424). This scene is placed immediately above the top of the large cross which fills the rest of the face of the slab and, as on the metalwork expressions of the motif discussed above, the beasts recognise Christ from a symbolic rather than a figural representation.

Some further objects and pieces of sculpture can be suggested here as representations of the recognition of Christ between two living things. On a series of hanging bowl mounts from Faversham (Kent) (illus 14), a prominent cross is flanked by two inward-facing sea-beasts, most probably dolphins (Bruce-Mitford 2005: 163–5; Youngs 2011: 4–6). Bruce-Mitford recognised that the

Faversham dolphins are ‘strikingly similar’ to those on the Armoy brooch, but because they are unparalleled among hanging-bowl mounts, their dating has been much debated (Bruce-Mitford 2005: 165). The most recent assessment of the Faversham mounts by Sue Youngs supports an early 6th-century date, and compares the design with a mosaic roundel of Christ flanked by four dolphins in San Vitale, Ravenna (Youngs 2011: 4–6). She notes that the ‘cross with dolphin iconography is unusual but not unique’ (Youngs 2011: 5) and indeed, several Pictish cross-slabs can also be suggested as featuring a related motif. In common with the Faversham mounts, the sculptured slabs feature a cross flanked by a pair of – what might be regarded as related – beasts with similarly curled tails: the so-called ‘fish-monster’ or ‘hippocamp’. On the Maiden Stone (Aberdeenshire) (illus 15), a human figure (perhaps Christ) stands on top of a large ring-headed cross, and is flanked by a pair of animals with curled tails; he reaches out with his right hand to touch one of the creatures (Fraser 2008: 32, no 33). On a cross-slab from Skinnet Chapel (Caithness), an interlace-filled cross is flanked by a pair of curled-tail animals whose mouths bite (and merge into the interlace within) the cross-shaft (Fraser 2008: 78, no 103). One of the sculptured stones from Mortlach features a pair of hippocamps immediately above a Christian cross (Fraser 2008: 112, no 161.1), and on a piece from Logierait, a pair flank the upper cross arm, reaching to bite a central



ILLUS 14 Hanging bowl mounts from Faversham, Kent (by permission of Oxford University Press, reproduced from Bruce-Mitford 2005: fig 142)

circle (possibly Eucharistic bread?) (Fraser 2008: 126, no 187.2).⁴

On the Dunfallandy (Perth & Kinross) cross-slab, two beasts lick and perhaps strive to bite a human head placed between them (Fraser 2008: 122, no 181). Unlike the hippocamps described above, this motif appears on the non-cross bearing face of the

Henderson 2004: 153). But the surrounding context of the motif might suggest that an alternative interpretation is possible: the head flanked by beasts appears immediately above two seated figures, facing each other across a free-standing cross. Arguably these two seated figures might also reference the recognition of Christ: on the Arrest page in the *Book of Kells*, a figural flanking of Christ is mirrored on the same page by a more abstract animal rendering of Christ's recognition between two beasts, identified by Éamonn Ó Carragáin as a 'visual pun' on the theme (Ó Carragáin 1994: 423).

A significant number of instances of the Canticle of Habakkuk-derived 'Christ between two beasts' motif discussed above feature abstract rather than figural representations of Christ. Rather than see this as symptomatic of Insular iconoclasm, George Henderson has suggested that instead we are simply seeing an inventive and independent use of imagery (Henderson pers

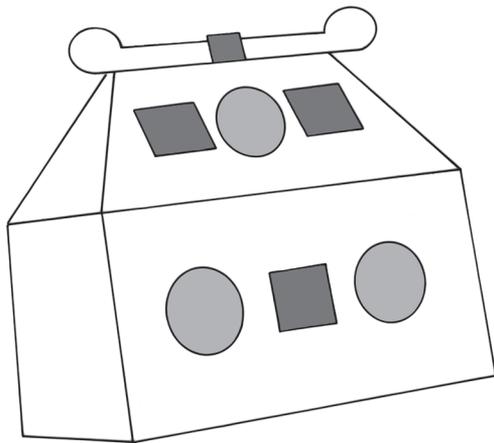
comm and *in prep*). This is characterised by a comfortable manipulation of complex animal- and interlace-based motifs and their use to subtly explore central Christian themes. The Monymusk reliquary, in common with other Insular house-shaped shrines, carries no figural decoration (unlike, for instance, a very similarly shaped 8th-century chrismatory of Anglo-Saxon or



ILLUS 15 The Maiden Stone, Aberdeenshire (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMS)

slab. The human head is at the apex of the stone, with the snake-like bodies of the beasts running down the whole length of the slab; the animal's fish-like tails do curl back on themselves, albeit not in the same stylized way as the hippocamps. The Hendersons see this as damnation imagery: 'a human head is caught, poised between the tongues or scorching breath of two dragons ...' (Henderson &

French manufacture with figural depictions of the Evangelists and Christ (Bagnoli et al 2011: 118, no 55)). Instead, it is decorated with interlace and animal art, much of which is subtle: lightly incised and punched designs make the animals on the silver front plate difficult to see; the cross identified by Stevenson is formed only in spaces between interlace strands in the small panel on the roof bar; the layout of the mounts on the front of the reliquary can be read as a cross-shape (or in two groups of three) but this is ambiguous, and not forced on the viewer (illus 16). Sue Youngs' description of a cruciform hanging bowl mount from Whitby as 'playing on the numbers three and four' (Youngs 2011: 7) also seems apt for the series of mounts on the front of the Monymusk reliquary. Perhaps the 'virtual' hiding of the animals within the Hunterston and 'Tara' brooch terminals is not so unusual in this context. Certainly the importance of animal and geometric art in communicating Christian ideas on metalwork is mirrored on Pictish sculpture too.



ILLUS 16 The Monymusk reliquary highlighting two different 'readings' of the (now incomplete) series of mounts (drawn by Marion O'Neil; © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

A further interpretation of the use of cross or lozenge to depict Christ in this motif can be suggested. The central cross-panel on the Hunterston brooch can be compared with a book shrine (Stevenson 1974: 40) or illuminated manuscript page. If the lozenge relates to Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos, then both the 'Tara' and Hunterston brooches can be seen as having word-orientated central elements. Perhaps the motivation for the use of the cross and lozenge was to emphasise the recognition of Christ through the word rather than being symptomatic of a reluctance to depict Christ in figural form.

Considering the iconographic programme of an object like the Hunterston brooch raises bigger questions around the distinction between 'secular' and 'church' metalwork. While brooches have often been regarded as secular objects, and particularly as indicators of (secular) social status (Nieke 1993), Stevenson supported the identification of Christian motifs in the decoration of the Hunterston brooch, to the extent that he referred to it as having an 'iconographic programme'. But our understanding of the extent and coherence of such programmes on 'secular' objects has not advanced significantly in the years since, and nor have the implications been explored. If we accept a coherent and subtle programme on objects like the Hunterston brooch, what does it tell us about personal expression of Christian devotion and the extent to which it had been integrated into the decoration of dress objects by the time the Hunterston brooch was made? Or does it have more to do with apotropaic functions of Christian imagery, and perceived practical advantages in terms of protection (Blackwell *forthcoming*)? Or does it suggest that objects such as brooches might have had a role in Christian rituals? These questions must be taken up by others, but here we can note that brooches are depicted on some pieces

of Christian sculpture, and indeed, Christ is shown wearing a brooch on the Arrest scene on Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice (Whitfield 2001: fig 6), flanked by his captors in a way that Bede and Jerome would have linked to the Cantic of Habakkuk. What has been identified as the Temptation of St Anthony, on the Market Cross at Kells, features a (brooch-wearing) figure flanked by two 'beast-headed tempters' (Whitfield 2004: 74, fig 2a).

If we return to the Hunterston and 'Tara' pseudo-penannular brooches, what are the implications of the identification of hidden animals in their terminal design, and in particular, the close interaction between these animals and symbols of Christ? The inclusion of the cross-panel on Hunterston, of course, meant the closing of what had been a gap between the terminals on a penannular brooch. This fundamentally changed the way the brooch functioned – removing the effective fastening action of the penannular brooch and instead rendering it essentially a pin with a large and elaborate head. What motivation was important enough to inspire or require such a change? The cross on the closing panel of the Hunterston brooch has meant that the role of Christian decoration in the development of the pseudo-penannular brooch has been debated. Niamh Whitfield has phrased the question as follows: 'Was the gap closed to incorporate a Christian symbol, or was a cross placed in the "gap" area because the terminals had already been joined and the space was available for this new element?' (Whitfield 2001: 231). Reginald Smith suggested a practical motivation: that strain caused by the increased size and weight made closing the gaps necessary (Smith 1914). Stevenson made several suggestions, one that familiarity with Anglo-Saxon disc or ring brooches demonstrated to the designer of the Hunterston brooch that the 'gap was not

essential and spoilt the sweep of his design' (Stevenson 1974: 33–4). This idea was taken up by Niamh Whitfield, who has suggested that a desire to imitate the elaborate Anglo-Saxon composite disc brooch lay behind the closing of the terminal gap (Whitfield 2001: 231–9). In her view, 'in assimilating foreign traditions the designers of the "Tara" and Hunterston brooches did not copy slavishly, but were quick to develop themes learnt abroad and modify them to suit their own taste' (Whitfield 2001: 238). Stevenson made an alternative proposition: that the cross panel of the Hunterston brooch might have been inspired by a Frankish reliquary brooch. Although the Hunterston panel does not function as a relic box (it is not hollow), he suggested that a putative functioning brooch-reliquary might have been the model on which Hunterston was based, and itself provide the reason behind the original closing of the gaps. He also likened the cross panel to a miniature book cover, thus suggesting that Christian symbolism might lie at the heart of why the brooch form was altered.

Closing the gap on the Hunterston brooch provided space for an extra field of decoration, but one which was positioned between the two opposed animal heads intrinsic to the form of the brooch. It provides space to add something for these embedded, implicit beasts (and the later explicit beasts of the ring-headed pins) to reach towards or to bite. Is it far-fetched to see the communication of 'Christ between two living things' as the motivation behind the development of the pseudo-penannular brooch type? The centrality of the Cantic of Habakkuk phrase to the rituals commemorating Christ's crucifixion, and its wide interpretation by early Christian commentators to encompass recognition of Christ generally, underline its importance. Crucially, closing the gaps between the terminals increased the surface

available for decoration, whilst maintaining a visual connection to the penannular brooch – the outline of the original penannular form remains clearly visible in the pseudo-penannular examples to those who are familiar with it. Can we suggest that this adaption of the penannular brooch form provided a means to convey the important concept of Christ recognised by two living things, but one which did so in such a way as to put the symbol of Christ at the centre – highlighted precisely because it was the part of the design which was added, embedded within the existing/traditional brooch design?

If so, it is only part of the picture. The Breadalbane brooch (British Museum 1919, 12–18, I; Youngs 1989: 94–5, no 72) was pseudo-penannular when it was made but it does not feature a symbol of Christ flanked by two beasts. Small explicit animal heads projecting into the body of the terminals from the point where they meet the hoop are, in common with the embedded animals of the Hunterston, orientated towards the wearer of the brooch, but they do not reach towards a single symbol of Christ. Instead, each beast reaches towards a three-lobed feature; any design element on the closing bar is lost to us. These three-lobed elements of the Breadalbane brooch might be read in context of the Christian Trinity, but each is flanked only by one animal, not a pair as on the Hunterston and ‘Tara’ brooches. The Dunbeath brooch fragment shows no evidence of having been from a pseudo-penannular brooch and yet it features the embedded animals in common with the Hunterston and ‘Tara’ brooches. On the Dunbeath brooch the animals would not have a central feature to strive towards. They are closer perhaps to the idea behind the animal-headed terminals on the St Ninian’s Isle (FC 295) and Freswick brooches discussed above – was this design adapted by the makers of the Hunterston and

‘Tara’ brooches? Here the issue of the relative dating of the brooches in question is important but, I would suggest, impossible to resolve closely with confidence. If the Dunbeath brooch is earlier than the Hunterston brooch then perhaps its embedded beasts (or those of contemporaries) provided inspiration for the Hunterston design and the closing of the gaps. Dunbeath is, however, usually regarded as later than the Hunterston brooch; perhaps the maker of the former liked the idea of the embedded beasts but objected to the pseudo-penannular form. Perhaps we should not expect a single surviving object such as the Hunterston brooch to provide all the answers.

CONCLUSION

The Hunterston brooch was interpreted by Stevenson as the earliest of the pseudo-penannular brooches to have survived. He emphasised the Christian meaning of its decoration in the presence of a cross panel surrounded by Creatures of Genesis rendered in filigree. This paper suggests that there is a further zoomorphic element to the Hunterston and ‘Tara’ brooches, embedded in the form of the terminals, and these implicit, hidden beasts interact more closely with the cross panel than the filigree animals. In contrast to Anglo-Saxon and Irish sculpture, the metalwork discussed here, and Pictish Class II sculpture in general, demonstrate a reluctance to depict Christ figuratively. Once this is recognised, the motif of (implicit or explicit) beasts flanking a symbol of Christ (cross or lozenge) is far more prevalent than has been previously appreciated. I suggest that these implicit beasts, and later explicit versions on ring-headed pins, are visual expressions of the recognition of Christ by two animals, rooted in the text of the Canticle of Habakkuk but interpreted widely by

Early Christian commentators to encompass the central concept of the recognition, the ‘knowing’, of Christ. As Hilary Richardson noted, it is possible to read a brooch (or sculpted stone or illuminated manuscript page) for the ‘texture of its decoration; but it becomes increasingly clear that in the art of the eighth century, meanings are layered and intertwined to give another dimension altogether, linking the spiritual and material in a way rarely if ever equalled’ (Richardson 1984: 46).

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NOTES

- 1 In fact this paper will be restricted to considering the *fronts* of the brooches under consideration. The occurrence of spiral-based designs on the backs of the Hunterston, ‘Tara’ and Breadalbane pseudo-penannular brooches in contrast to generally plain backs of penannular brooches is a significant feature but one which will need to be explored elsewhere.
- 2 The St Ninian’s Isle chapes also provide a parallel for two inward-facing animal heads joined by a single ‘body’. On the centre of the ‘body’ of each of the chapes is a cross-based design – a squat cross in-filled with spirals on FC 283, and a small four-lobed mount on FC 282. Whilst not strictly in the same position – immediately between the jaws – as on the brooches, these chapes might nonetheless be suggested as further putative examples of the same motif.

- 3 Moulds for the manufacture of similarly decorated pins excavated from the Mote of Mark were wrongly identified as buckle moulds by the excavator: Laing & Longley 2006: 63–5, fig 26, fig 54, 144–5.
- 4 There is also an example of a pair of hippocamps on the non-cross bearing face on ‘Rodney’s Stone’, Brodie Castle (Moray); between them are a collection of small motifs, one akin to a penannular brooch, the others spiral-based and below are two large Pictish symbols: Fraser 2008: 104, no 151.

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