II.

THE HUMAN HEAD IN INSULAR PAGAN CELTIC RELIGION.

By ANNE ROSS, Ph.D., F.S.A.Scot.

Introduction.

A Scottish Tricephalos said to come from Sutherland.

Through the generosity of the Trustees of the Dick Institute, Kilmarnock, an important carved head of a kind not hitherto recorded from Scotland has been added to the National Museum.[1] It had for long been exhibited in the Institute's museum as an early font, and the only record of its provenance is "Sutherlandshire."

This head, 4·7 ins. high and 5·4 by 5 ins. broad, is shaped like a ball, truncated top and bottom. The top is hollowed into a conical cup about 3 ins. across and 2·6 ins. deep. The base is slightly concave. Three faces have been carved round the sides. Rounded incisions about $\frac{1}{4}$–$\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide and about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. in depth outline three pairs of eyes, chins and drooping, triangular moustaches, while a line continuous round the stone indicates the mouths. Broader lines were used to indicate the inner curves of the cheeks and the sides of the drop-shaped noses. Between the faces there are similarly incised crosses, equal-armed, about 2 ins. overall except for one, now damaged, about 1 in. high with a very uncertain horizontal stroke not more than $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long.

The stone is granite, speckled black, white and pink. Miss H. MacDonald of the Geological Survey and Museum, South Kensington, has kindly examined it. She describes it as a medium-grained microline-granite and notes that it is very similar to specimens of biotite microline-granite from Norway. It does not resemble English or Irish granites in their collection, nor according to Miss MacDonald and Dr J. Phemister of the Survey's Scottish office, is it Scottish. The latter does not think that a natural erratic of Norwegian granite would be found in Sutherland. Some other continental origin is also possible as the Survey's collection of granites is not exhaustive.

Unless the Sutherland provenance is incorrect, one may speculate whether the head was brought to Scotland by fugitives from the Romans, for a date

[1] Acquired by Mr John S. Clarke, sometime F.S.A.Scot. from a Glasgow antique shop before the First World War.

about the turn of the Christian era is possible for it, or whether possibly it retained its significance sufficiently long to be brought over by the Norsemen.[1]

Scope of the Study.

The appearance of this tricephalos opens the way for pertinent questions as to its place in archæological chronology, its function and its artistic relationships. Alone, it can tell us little. Its three faces imply a religious significance of some sort, and the crosses which take the place of ears would lead to the conclusion that the religion in question was Christianity. The drooping triangular moustaches are a typically Celtic feature, familiar to us from numerous examples of La Tène metalwork and certain Romano-British religious representations. This three-faced head divorced from its proper context can thus yield little specific information. It so happens, however, that in pagan Celtic religious representative tradition, in attested Celtic social custom and in early Welsh and Irish written sources, the head figures naturalistically, or in bi- or tricephalic form, as an independent entity to a striking degree; to such an extent that it is possible from an examination of some of the more outstanding examples, to place this Scottish tricephalos fairly confidently in its original artistic and religious orbit.

It is proposed to concentrate the following investigation of head symbolism on the evidence from Britain and Ireland. The Gaulish material is more plentiful, but the major examples have been discussed recently by Lambrechts,[2] and apart from drawing attention to one or two of the continental monuments for comparative purposes, it is not proposed to study them in this context. We are led to conclude, mainly from the Gaulish evidence, that the head was the bodily member which was especially venerated by the Celts, that the head was regarded by them as the seat of the soul, the centre of the vital essence, symbolic of the regenerative forces of life.

We have evidence from classical sources, fully substantiated by early insular vernacular tradition, that the head was prized by the Celts as a war trophy. The fact that severed heads were impaled on stakes about their dwellings and temples implies that they had a dual significance for their owners, *i.e.* as irrefutable evidence of military prowess, and as amulets.[3]

[1] I am indebted to Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities for these details and for kind permission to publish the head.

[2] Lambrechts, Pierre, *L' Exaltation de la Tete dans la Pensée et dans l'Art des Celtes*, Bruges, 1954.

[3] "When they depart from battle they hang the heads of their enemies from the necks of their horses . . . and nail the spectacle to the entrances of their homes."

Strabo IV, 4, 5. (Loeb II, 247).

"The heads of enemies of high repute, however, they used to embalm in cedar oil and exhibit to strangers, and they would not deign to give them back even for a ransom of an equal weight of gold. . . ."

Strabo.

The apotropaic significance of the human head is fully attested by the enigmatic antefixa from Caerleon, Silchester, Dorchester and Towcester, where sculpted heads, or representations of heads in relief must have been quite common, as numerous moulds and fragments of antefixa show.[1] Their appearance on such objects would serve to stress their amuletic function.

The frequency with which the head figures on Gallo-Roman religious monuments, both in the round and in relief, is sufficient to substantiate its religious connotation in Gaul, and to give a satisfactory corpus of evidence for insular comparison. The striking tricephalic heads from the territory of the Remi in particular illustrate the reverence accorded to the head. Here the deity is symbolised by an enormous bearded tricephalos, having a leaf-crown, and usually equated with the classical Mercury.[2] These particular representations would seem to testify to the concept of some autochthonous deity as a head alone, the head sufficing for the total being, the vital part, embued with the power of the whole.

In some respects, the study of Celtic religion as evidenced from Gaul, is facilitated by the wealth of actual religious representations and by classical references which, although few in number, do contain some information which can help to guide the investigator through the pitfalls of *interpretatio Romana*. In Britain considerably less material evidence is available, and this is discouragingly scattered and heterogeneous and much of it seemingly unrelated. The large corpus of early Irish and Welsh texts can help to a certain extent, but only when the archæological evidence has been examined and classified. A study of the confused corpus of religious representations and epigraphical material does, however, indicate certain patterns and tendencies which, if not unique to Celtic religious idiom and temperament, are distinguished by the emphasis laid upon them. One of these recurrent and predominant themes is the human head.

It would, of course, have been possible to study the Scottish head from the point of view of tricephalic deities in general, but it is felt that such representations and the concept that underlies them are but a single manifestation of a more general cult of the head, and it was thought more satis-

---

"When their enemies fall they cut off their heads and fasten them about the necks of their horses . . . and carry them off as booty, singing a paean over them and striking up a song of victory, and these first fruits of battle they fasten by nails upon their houses . . . the heads of their most distinguished enemies they embalm in cedar-oil and carefully preserve in a chest and these they exhibit to strangers, gravely maintaining that in exchange for this head someone of their ancestors, or the man himself, refused the offer of a great sum of money. And some men among them we are told, boast that they have not accepted an equal weight of gold for the head they show. . . ." Diodorus. (Loeb III, 173).

"The consuls . . . got no report of the disaster till some Gallic horsemen came in sight, with heads hanging at their horses' breasts or fixed on their lances, and singing their customary song of triumph." Livy X, **26**, 11. (Loeb IV, 459).

[1] P. 28 ff.

[2] V. Espérandieu, Emile, *Recueil Général des Bas-Reliefs Statues et Bustes de la Gaule Romaine*, V, pls. 3651, 3652, 3655, 3656, 3657, 3762, *et seq.*

factory at this stage to regard it in the light of the wider cult of the head in Britain.

British and Irish head representations can be divided up into several categories which will be examined according to their importance in relationship to the Scottish head rather than chronologically. The material falls into the following groups:

1. Sculpted heads set on bases, usually carved in one with the base or showing no trace of having at any time formed part of complete statues. These again can be sub-divided into:
   (*a*) Heads having attributes whereby they can more readily be connected with specific deities or religious cults, and
   (*b*) Heads similar to (*a*) but without attributes.
2. Heads in relief on altars or pillars, having or not having attributes, or being brought into association with the attributes of some specific deity. It is not proposed to include here monuments which are clearly funerary portraits. Although heads, rather than busts tend to be figured on sepulchral monuments, this may spring from the Celtic concept of death and decapitation as being more or less synonymous, and the actual cult significance of such representations cannot be demonstrated. The important antefixa from Caerleon (Isca Silurum) will also be discussed here.
3. Heads figuring on metalwork objects having a ritual significance such as buckets, cauldrons, personal adornments, and weapons, which were originally venerated as being inhabited by independent spirits. These various representations will be discussed and described in an attempt to remove the Scottish tricephalos from isolation and place it in the context to which it rightly belongs.

As tricephalic representations are comparatively rare in Britain, and as they are the most striking distinguishing feature of the Scottish head, they will be discussed first.

1*a*, 1. *Tricephaloi.*

(i) *Sutherland* (Pl. III).

Three-faced head, with hollow in the top, probably for libations, thus serving as a small, portable shrine. For full description of this head *v.* p. 10 ff. above.

(ii) *Corleck, Co. Cavan*[1] (Pl. IV).

The most significant head in relation to the Scottish head comes from Ireland. It has been worked from a block of sandstone into a head having three faces, the features in fairly low relief, and bearing a striking resemblance to the Roquepertuse janiform heads.[2] The eyes are wide and round, the mouth small, nose straight

[1] Raftery, J., *Prehistoric Ireland*, 1951, fig. 263.
[2] Espérandieu, No. 7616.

and chin pointed. The faces may be described as being without expression, and here they are clean-shaven. No neck is indicated. The head probably dates from the later La Tène period.

(iii) *La Pouquelaie, Guernsey.*[1]

A three-headed bust set on a gabled plinth, carved out of grey granite. The height of the monument is some 15 ins. The features are reminiscent of the Gaulish heads, but the Guernsey tricephalos is distinguished by the fact that there are three separate heads conjoined here, rather than the usual three faces on one head. The general treatment of the heads, the lack of expression and the fact that they closely resemble Gallo-Roman works of the 1st and 2nd centuries, would point to some date immediately prior to, or during the Roman occupation of Britain for this tricephalos.

(iv) *Risingham (Habitancum), Northumberland.*[2]

A fourth British tricephalos which belongs in fact to Section II (*Heads in Relief*), but which it will be convenient to include here, is figured on a slab dedicated by the Fourth Mounted Cohort of Gauls "Numini(bus) Augustor(um) coh(ors) IIII Gal(lorum) eq(uitata) fec(it)." "To the spirits of the august ones, the Fourth Mounted Cohort of Gauls made this." Two bird-headed terminals enclose a bearded, pointed human face. A Victory stands on a globe and holds a wreath or torc. A crane (a bird which figures in Celtic mythology as a form for metamorphosed women, and in connection with war) proceeds to the left, from three berries, while Mars is depicted with a goose below him. Above either pelta is a neckless human head, that to the right being heavily bearded and having prominent ears, the one to the left being bearded, moustached and tricephalic.

(v) *Wroxeter.*[3]

The representation of a deity having three or four heads comes from Viroconium (Wroxeter). It seems to have formed part of the capital of the basilica. It is fashioned from a block of grey sandstone, and is 20 ins. long and 9 ins. high. It is unclassical both in conception and execution and is clearly the work of a native artist, representing a local god. The work is fragmentary, the lower part of the three faces being damaged, and it is not possible to tell whether the faces were bearded or not. The eyes are strangely slanting, as are those of a similar, single but independent head which was found near the multiple-headed monument, and may represent the same god naturalistically. This monument reveals a strength and vigour which may perhaps be compared with that of the tricephalos from Condat.[4]

(vi) *Llandinam, Monmouthshire.*[5]

A tricephalos in wood from Llandinam Church, Monmouthshire, carries on the early tradition. Three heads are carved in high relief from a block of wood, conjoined so that there are four eyes and three noses. The central face is bearded.

[1] Kendrick, T. D., *The Archæology of the Channel Islands*, I, London, 1928, pl. V.

[2] *A History of Northumberland*, XV, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1940, pl. facing p. 80.

[3] Atkinson, D., *Report on Excavations at Wroxeter*, 1923–7, pl. 60.

[4] Espérandieu, 1316.

[5] Hemp, W. J., *A "Grotesque" in Llandinam Church*, the Montgomeryshire Collections, LIV, 11, 1956, pl. IV.

The tricephalos apparently came to Llandinam Church without any provenance or history. It hung from a nail on the south wall of the south aisle. It is not easy to attach a date to this carving, and in no way does it resemble the medieval three-headed beings which were sometimes used to depict the Trinity.

(vii) *Ireland.*[1]

A three-faced or four-faced head occurs on an ivory pendant now in the National Museum of Ireland. The pendant is shaped like a horn, terminating at one end in a duck's head, surmounted at the other end by a three-headed male, having flowing moustaches, and being reminiscent of the little head on the back of the duck from Rotherley.[2] The style of the head is early but the bird's head is reminiscent of Viking art, and the object thus cannot be of very early date. The combination of stylized duck-heads, with human masks, is directly in line with the early Celtic tradition, the Torrs pony-cap providing one example. One may speculate whether this was a personal ornament worn as a talisman, or used in religious ceremonies. A three-headed figure occurs on another horn—the shorter golden horn from Gallehus. In this case there are three separate heads and necks, these being conjoined at the base of the necks.

These then are the only tricephaloi as yet known from the British Isles which are likely to be early in date, namely, one from Scotland, two from Ireland (one of which is unlikely to be early), three from England and Wales (that from Llandinam being problematic as to date), and one from the Channel Islands. The Risingham stone has clear Gaulish connections, the Guernsey head likewise would seem to derive artistically from Gaul. The Irish head in stone has affinities with the Roquepertuse sculptures, and the Scottish head may also have Gaulish associations, in symbolism and mode of representation, if not of actual origin. The continental Celts may then have brought this religious concept with them when they came to Britain and Ireland at a pre-Roman period, and the Risingham altar would thus be perpetuating a tradition already known in Britain. The idea of triplication is essentially fundamental to early Celtic thought and outlook. Deities are conceived of as having three heads or three faces; sacred animals are given three rather than two horns. At a later stage, the vernacular tradition describes mythological or super-human beings as occurring in trios, bearing the same name, but with individual epithets, being born at one birth, and sometimes (like the three sons of Uisliu) meeting with the same fate, usually decapitation. These triple characters then may well reflect another aspect of the same fundamental, pagan concept of the magical or sacred power of the number three.

Apart from being triplicated the head was also duplicated, the power-of-the-twin concept no doubt underlying this mode of representation. There are several janiform heads from Britain and Ireland, the most striking examples coming again from Ireland.

[1] *Catalogue of the Royal Irish Academy*, Dublin, 1857, 339.
[2] *Infra*, p. 34.

1*a*, 2. *Janus Heads.*

(viii) *Boa Island, Fermanagh* [1] (Pl. IV).

A fine Janus-faced statue, probably dating from the La Tène period, but in common with several other religious representations from Ireland, all of which show early features and possibly date from the Iron Age, lack of chronology makes more than an approximate dating hazardous. The two figures are back to back, the bodies square and atrophied, clearly subordinated to the heads, with small, strap-like arms and traces of a waist belt, in the style of the statue-menhirs. The huge heads are triangular, the beards pointed, eyes enormous, noses long and narrow. The statue is strongly reminiscent of the "Maponus" head from Corbridge, and this would perhaps be a guide to an early dating for the latter, which is perhaps pre-Roman both in art style and in execution.

(ix) *Kilnaboy, Clare.*[2]

This unusually-shaped Janus-faced monument has the heads placed chin to chin rather than in the more usual back to back position. The necks are decorated with a torc-like neck-band (worn by gods and warriors); the faces are typically La Tène in style, their stereotyped "expressionless" features in low relief.

(x) *Corbridge* (*Corstopitum*).[3]

An impressive Janus-faced head comes from Corstorpitum. It is unfortunately damaged, but sufficient remains of the lower part of the face to indicate that it was in the typical triangular tradition of the early Celtic metalwork, broad at the brows, narrow and pointed towards the chin. It measures 8 ins. high by 8 ins. wide (a fairly typical measurement for such heads), and is fashioned from a coarse type of gritstone. The top is slightly curved, with a suggestion of hair arranged in bands running from back to front. The eyebrows are prominent the brow furrowed. The eyes are large and deep-set. The nose is straight and there are traces of side whiskers, a feature common to several heads from the region of Hadrian's Wall. The mouth is small, and from what can be seen of it, drooping. It is impossible to say whether there was a beard or not, the lower part of the face being completely destroyed. The reverse side of the stone is occupied by a second, smaller figure, more crudely worked than the first head. The figure is that of a man, and what remains of his body indicates that it was very much subordinated to the head. The chin is broad, the eyes huge, the nose short, and a moustache is clearly depicted. The mouth is small and severe. As is the case with the head on the reverse side of the monument, and with other heads from Corstopitum described in Section I*b infra*, one eye is markedly smaller than the other. In view of the nature of these monuments, it is clear that this feature can hardly be fortuitous, but an explanation does not come readily to mind. Additional evidence may help to elucidate it at some future date, but meanwhile its possible significance is a matter for speculation. Richmond [4] comments on the two flap-like protruberances which come down from the side of the head to about ear-level, and takes them to represent the winged hat of the classical Mercury. This seems

[1] Henry, F., *Irish Art*, London, 1940, 4*b*.

[2] Raftery, *op. cit.*, fig. 261.

[3] Richmond, I. A., "Two Celtic Heads in Stone from Corbridge, Northumberland," in *Dark Age Britain*, London, 1956, 11 ff.

[4] *Op. cit.*, 12.

extremely doubtful, the monument showing no signs whatsoever of the influence of *interpretatio Romana*, nor is there any inscription which might point to this equation with the Roman god. Moreover, an examination of native representations of the classical Mercury from the general region of the Wall reveals that the wings of the petassus, where diverging from the classical mode of representation appear as almost horn-like protruberances, where Mercury seems to be becoming confused with his native, horned counterpart. It is also open to doubt whether this feature is really deliberate at all, or whether it is not simply an illusion created by the projecting pieces of stone on either side of the head which form part of the broad upper part of the first head. The extreme irregularity of the "flaps" would indeed suggest this to be the case. The head shows traces of horns. This head, in conjunction with one or two others from the same locality are associated with a native shrine in which an indigenous god, "Maponus" was worshipped, and whose cult was accepted by high-ranking officers of the Roman army. A dedication to this god is recorded from Gaul.[1] The name survives in Welsh vernacular tradition as *Mabon*.

(xi) *Kent*.[2]

A janiform head is recorded by Horsely who illustrates it, and gives Kent as its provenance with no further details. It is difficult to make a precise estimation of this head from Horsley's drawing. It consists of the head of an old man set back to back with that of a young man, the whole on a base, no neck being indicated. The young man has long hair and the old man wears some kind of helmet.

Another group of heads belonging to Britain, and being distinguished by some tangible attribute, is that depicting a horned or antlered god. Such a god-type is well-known from Gaul, the god *Cernunnos* furnishing the best example of this concept. Several monuments representing a similar deity are known from Britain and Ireland, but here, however, we shall be dealing in the main with representations of the god as a head alone.

1*a*, 3. *Horned Heads.*

(xii) *Netherby, Carlisle*.[3]

The first head in this group is the most dramatic artistically, and illustrates the cult of a horned god, in some of his aspects a warrior god, which was widespread in Cumberland, eastwards along the Wall and S. into Yorkshire—roughly throughout the territory of the Brigantes. The head is some 8 ins. in height, fashioned from red sandstone, square rather than triangular in shape, with a powerful, seemingly clean-shaven chin, flattened features, the eyes half-closed, the whole aspect grim and war-like. From the top of this impressive head grow two ram-horns which curve round and down towards the ears.

[1] From Bourbonne-les-Bains, *C.I.L.*, XIII, 5924.

[2] Horsley, John, *Britannia Romana*, London, 1732, v. *Kent*. One may perhaps compare a full-length janiform figure from Reims, where the face of a young man and of an old man are united on the same body. (Espérandieu, p. 3666.)

[3] In Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. I am indebted to Mr Robert Hogg, Keeper, for kind permission to publish a photograph of this head.

(xiii) *Carvoran* [1] (Pl. IV).

An impressive head worked from a large piece of stone, the back of which seems to have formed part of a building, so this head may have been used as something in the nature of an antefix. There is no neck, and the features are in fairly low relief. The ears are large and coarse and placed in an unusually low position. Horns grow from the top of the head. The eyes are huge, the nose wedge-shaped, the mouth straight, a moustache indicated by pick-marks. The head is fashioned of pale yellow sandstone $10\frac{1}{4}$ ins. in height. It is reminiscent of two of the cat-eared heads on the unique Caerleon antefixa discussed on p. 28 *infra*.

(xiv) *Lanchester*.[2]

Small figure consisting of an impressive head set on an atrophied body, carved in the round. The head is horned, is bearded and has side-whiskers and the expression is severe. The figure may be phallic, but the worn condition of the stone makes this problematic. Some circular attribute is held in the right hand.

(xv) *Alnwick, Northumberland*.[3]

Bearded, horned head, with usual large eyes, straight, expressionless mouth and wedge-shaped nose. The height is $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

(xvi) *Chesters* (*Cilurnum*).[4]

A horned head, fashioned from a block of stone, having a very thick, elongated neck which was probably set upon a base. The head is typical of the heads described in this section, having large eyes, straight nose, and firm, slightly drooping mouth, giving an expression of withdrawn severity to the features.

(xvii) *Corstopitum*.[5]

A very impressive head has large eyes, well-defined eyebrows, moustache, beard and sidewhiskers. The mouth and nose are straight. The head is crudely fashioned at the back, has no neck, and seems to have been originally fashioned to stand on a base. The expression, and general thickness and strength of neck are reminiscent of the Towcester antefix, discussed on p. 26 *infra*. The head shows traces of having been horned.

(xviii) *Benwell* (*Condercum*).[6]

While it is not directly relevant to this study to trace the cult of a native horned god in Britain, one monument may perhaps be included here. This is a fine head from the little temple dedicated to the god *Antenociticus* in the grounds

[1] Collingwood, R. G., *Roman Inscriptions and Sculptures belonging to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne*. Newcastle upon Tyne, 1926, No. 300.

[2] Collingwood Catalogue, No. 273.

[3] In the collection of the Joint Museum of Roman Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne. Formerly part of the collection of Roman stones owned by the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle, it did not appear in the Catalogue published in 1880. As most of the Roman stones came from High Rochester or Risingham in Redesdale, it may have come from one of these sites, but this is not at all certain.

[4] In the Roman Museum at Chesters.

[5] In the Roman Museum at Corstopitum.

[6] Collingwood Catalogue, No. 302. F. G. Simpson and Richmond, I. A., *The Roman Fort on Hadrian's Wall at Benwell*, Archæologia Æliana, 1941, XIX, 37 ff.

of Condercum House, Benwell, Northumberland. As a forearm and a leg were found nearby, we must conclude that the head, which is 12½ ins. high, originally formed part of an impressive statue with naturalistically-proportioned limbs. The head is of native workmanship, but classical influence is evident. The sculpture is of a good artistic standard, and the expression, although milder and less intense than is usual in the case of the purely native heads, is serious and self-contained. The face of the god is youthful and dignified, with the usual large eyes, and there are traces of a substantial torc about the neck. The hair is depicted in native fashion, and is plentiful, strands of hair falling from crown to brow in great profusion. The most interesting feature however, is the fact that two thick strands of hair turn back over the brow to form a decoration which one can be fairly confident represents atrophied horns. This feature is more clearly illustrated by a small human head in bronze from Thealby (*v.* p. 33 *infra*) where the hair is combed down on to the brow in native fashion, and a pair of atrophied horns are likewise demarcated flat on the brow. For other examples of this feature see sections on *Antefixa* and *Metalwork*. The god wears a torc.

Fragments of three altars have been found in the temple of Antenociticus, on one of which two mistletoe berries are carved, close to the name of the god. This feature brings to mind the three berries from which the crane walks on the Risingham slab (*v.* p. 14 *supra*). The torc was a badge worn frequently by Celtic deities. It was one of the most persistent attributes of the Gaulish horned god, Cernunnos. The following horned head would seem to have been directly connected with his cult.

(xix) *Cirencester* (*Corinium*).[1]

A small male head carved from oolite, having curled hair and horns. To support the equation of this Cirencester deity with Cernunnos comes a relief in local stone of a horned god with curled hair. He grasps a large serpent below the head with either hand. The serpents are ram-horned, have their tongues projecting, and raise their heads towards that of the deity.

(xx) *Tanderagee, Ireland.*[2]

Although horned gods do not figure to any extent on pagan Irish monuments this is not surprising as such monuments are extremely limited in number. A strange figure, showing very early features, and perhaps dating from the Iron Age consists of a large head superimposed on a small, badly-proportioned body. The mouth is wide and grotesque, the moustache boldly drawn. A line which may to indicate the edge of a helmet comes well down over the brow. From this helmet, or from the actual head project two horns.

(xxi) *Verulamium.*[3]

A mosaic pavement is decorated with the impressive head of a bearded god, having protuberances from his head which are described by Wheeler as lobster claws. This would identify the figure with Oceanus. They would seem however to be more in the nature of stag-antlers and here we may have yet further evidence for the cult of a horned god in Britain.

[1] In the Corinium Museum at Cirencester.
[2] Henry, *op. cit.*, pl. 3*b*. In Armagh Cathedral.
[3] Wheeler, R. E. M., *Verulamium*, Oxford, 1936, pl. XLI.

Gorgon Heads.

Another group of heads which can be included in this section on horned heads, as most of them are horn-bearing or have traces of horns are the heads which may be classed, not very satisfactorily as Gorgon or Medusa heads. This is a misleading term, the so-called Medusa heads as portrayed by native artists in Britain having little in common with their classical counterparts. The question of the origin and art-form of the Gorgon head in Britain is one which merits an independent study, but one or two observations may perhaps be made in this context.

The neckless Gorgon or Medusa head, although having no obvious religious significance in classical times shows traces of a long ancestry amongst the Indo-European peoples, where in all probability it served as a solar symbol, and later, under classical influence, it became crystallised into a staring, serpent-wreathed symbol of evil-averting power. It would be placed upon such objects as shields, temple porticos, eaves of buildings, etc. in much the same way as the Celtic *tête coupée* was exhibited, sharing with it in apotropaic powers, but having lost the divine association of the Celtic heads. The Celtic heads were sometimes represented as having horns, and horned heads were not infrequently brought into the context of sacred serpents and the cult of thermal waters. The Medusa heads were likewise sometimes associated with thermal springs, and invariably with serpents. The assimilation of classical with native imagery is not therefore a complicated process. The native could clearly make concessions to the classical Gorgon-type while retaining the symbolism and cult significance of the god-in-head form, and making the representation acceptable to Roman and native alike. Deep-rooted native cults could thus be thinly masked under the image of Medusa, only the individuality of expression and vigour of execution betraying the non-classical origin of these heads. One or two of the more interesting examples of so-called Gorgon heads in Britain will be described in an attempt to illustrate the above comments.

(xxii) *Bath* (*Aquæ Sulis*).[1]

The Romano-British temple at Bath was connected with the cult of a native goddess *Sulis*, equated with Minerva, and with the god Leucetius, equated with Mars. The temple, built probably during the Flavian period, was associated with deities of healing; their names implying an earlier association with solar cults. The Gorgon's head on the shield of Sulis-Minerva in the pediment of the temple is the finest example of the blending of native and classical imagery. The head is male, bearded and moustached, and its ancestry can be traced directly to the human heads which are so prolific on La Tène metalwork. The furrowed brow and two-dimensional features are typical of many examples of Romano-British

[1] Richmond, I. A. and Toynbee, J. M. C., "The Temple of Sulis-Minerva at Bath," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1955, XLV, pl. XXIX.

heads in stone, as is the expression of the face.[1] The convention of the writhing serpents which here spring from the hair and are entwined in the beard and moustache is classical, but the connection of serpents with human heads is found deeply rooted in the native tradition.

(xxiii) *Chesters.*[2]

A head, which undoubtedly represents the fusion of the classical Gorgon head with the native concept is figured on the pediment of a tombstone at Chester. It is typical of the Celtic heads, being bearded having moustaches and native-type hair, the snakes framing the face. Like the Bath head it is male.

(xxiv) *Caerleon (Isca Silurum).*[3]

Head carved in relief in the centre of a large stone. The eyes are large, the nose wedge-shaped, mouth straight and severe, and the forehead frowning. The hair is ray-like and from it sprouting horns emerge. The beard is entwined with serpents. This constitutes a crude native version of the Gorgon head, and comes from an area where the antefixa are rich in native head imagery.

(xxv) *Maryport (Alauna).*[4]

A striking example of a *tête coupée* with serpents, which is not a Gorgon-type head but which clearly illustrates this fundamental native concept of a head associated with serpents, is found in a stone from Maryport, known locally as the Serpent Stone. It is 51 ins. high and has a serpent on one side, 2 ins. broad and 45 ins. long. It is horn-bearing. On the other side is a neckless human head, the eyes seemingly closed, the mouth half-open, the whole aspect fierce and barbaric. Two serpents rear up and form a frame for the face which is moustached and probably bearded. Below the chin is a torc. Portions of a second, broader serpent were found nearby, the whole closely associated with two burials. According to local tradition the stone had phallic associations. Here then we have a human head, constituting a fine example of the Celtic *tête coupée* tradition, associated with serpents (one of which is horned) and fish. The horned serpent would suggest a connection both with war and with some aquatic cult, this supposition is strengthened by the presence of the fish. The local cult described in native terms on this impressive stone may not then have differed fundamentally from that practised at Aquæ Sulis where the local deities of the thermal waters, Sulis and Leucetius were equated with Mars and Minerva, both of whom presided over war, and where the "decapitated" head and the serpents were welded by a Celtic artist into the classical image of the Gorgon.

1*a*, 4. *"Phallic" Heads.*

There is ample evidence, both in Celtic iconography and in the Irish and Welsh vernacular tradition, for the veneration of the human head. Many powers were attributed to it. It was symbolic of deity. It may, at some

[1] Attention may be drawn to a head recently placed on view in the Yorkshire Museum, York, which ressembles the Bath "gorgon" head, but the stranded hair has no serpents entwined in it and it is altogether more native in concept.

[2] Richmond and Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pl. XXXVI, 2.

[3] Richmond and Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pl. XXXVI, 3.

[4] Bailey, J. B., *Netherhall Collection*, Kendal, 1915. The male head rises to a strange point on top, which is somewhat reminiscent of the head from Killavilla, Ireland (38) and it may represent some sort of *cucullus*.

period prior to the emergence of a distinctive Celtic peoples, have had some solar symbolism, as the substitution of the human head for the solar disc on early solar barks indicates. Moreover it was clearly believed by the Celts to be the bodily member in which the life force was situated, and possession of the head gave the owner access to the powers of the living man. This "decapitated" head could avert evil, and foretell events. Old Irish *Cond* an alternative form of *cend*, means "head" and "wisdom."

The apparent lack of phallic imagery in Celtic iconography has frequently aroused comment. It does occur, for example in connection with the British horned god, and with a British god of the Hercules type, but such monuments are comparatively rare. There is, however, sufficient evidence to suggest that the "decapitated" head set upon a stone pillar was, amongst other things, a phallic symbol, in which the apotropaic powers of both head and phallus became united into a potent whole. The fact that the head was conceived of as the centre of the life force, capable of continued independent existence after the death of the body, points to this conclusion. The implication is then that the usual Celtic symbolism had come into operation here, the male organ being represented symbolically rather than naturalistically. Such symbolism would help to explain the comparative lack of phallic monuments, and would emphasise the fact that any attempt to appreciate or come to terms with the religious and superstitious attitudes of the Celts must take into account their preference for oblique rather than direct expression. In order to give weight to this suggestion, one or two monuments are described which would seem to substantiate it.

(xxvi) *Pfalzfeld, St Goar.*[1]

A stone pillar, originally over 6 ft. in height, shaped like a phallus, the glans resting on the ground. Originally it was surmounted by a head bearing some sort of stylised horns. On each of the four sides is a typically Celtic triangular human face surmounted by a leaf crown which also probably doubles for horns. This unique monument dates from about the 5th or 4th century B.C. It shows Etruscan influence in the decorative motifs. Phalloid tombstones are known from Etruria, without the addition of heads.

As this paper is primarily concerned with evidence from the British Isles, attention will only be drawn to one further example of heads in association with phallic symbols from Europe. Two enigmatic monuments come from Jutland.

(xxvii) *Tommerby, North-west Jutland.*[2]

A pillar in an early Renaissance church at Tommerby has a font in the shape of a phallus, the sides decorated with a spiral pattern, the cup hollowed from the

[1] Powell, T.G.E., *The Celts*, London, 1958 pl. 60.,

[2] Details of this pillar and a photograph were kindly provided by Pastor Østergaard, Glejbjerg, Denmark.

top of the glans presumably for liquid offerings. Also from southern Jutland [1] comes a similar phallic pillar, in this case having the sides adorned with human masks from one or two of which a phallus grows from the top of the head. The dating of these objects is problematic but they are two of many from this area which show affinities with the Celtic material.

(xxviii) *Broadway, Worcestershire.*[2]

Oolitic stone shaped like a phallus, on the glans of which is a crude human face carved in relief, the glans thus serving for the head. The face closely resembles some of the faces on the impressive Gloucestershire reliefs. This combination of head and phallus from Broadway would thus seem to be a stage between the naturalistic representation of the actual phallus and the symbolism of the neckless head set on a pillar which would seem to be a phallic symbol.

(xxix) *Eype, Dorset.*[3]

Large pebble, now $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins. high in the shape of a phallus engraved with a human head, the features reminiscent of certain monuments from Europe, for example the janiform statue from Holzgerlingen, Württemberg, and the heads from Roquepertuse. Below the face are four interlaced circles. The lower part of the stone is broken.

(xxx) *Corbridge* (*Corstopitum*) [4] (Pl. V).

A crude head carved in one with the base, much worn, but apparently phallus-shaped originally. The head, which is also the glans of the phallus, has no ears, a large mouth, emphatic moustache, narrow nose, and wide eyes, and in expression resembles the monument from Tanderagee, Ireland discussed on p. 19 *supra.*

The above examples thus furnish some direct evidence for the suggestion that the "decapitated" head set on a pillar stone constitutes a phallic symbol.

1*b. Heads Without Attributes.*

The heads included in this section, while having a cult significance, are not distinguished by such individual attributes as horns, multiplicity of faces, etc. They consist of simple heads which may have functioned as small shrines, or may simply have served to decorate the temple of some native deity.

(xxxi) *Killavilla, Ireland* [5] (Pl. V).

A male head, some 16 ins. high, fashioned from a lump of limestone with an unworked back and base was uncovered at the base of a larger boulder which was being moved. One of the most impressive heads described in this paper, its lean,

[1] From Rorkaer, South Jutland. Details and photograph from Pastor Østergaard.
[2] *Ant. J.*, XXVIII, pl. XXIV, *e* and *f*, and 166 for Professor Hawkes' interesting comments.
[3] *Ant. J.*, XVI, pl. LIX, 2, and 323.
[4] In the Roman Museum at Corstopitum.
[5] *J.R.S.A.I.*, 1945, 265.

hollow cheeks, lipless slit for mouth, staring eyes and broad flattened nose link it with such heads as those on the Aylesford bucket (p. 31 *infra*), the Corleck tricephalos (p. 13 *supra*), and the janiform heads from Roquepertuse. It is likely to date from the early Iron Age. The head lacks ears, a feature not infrequently found with cult heads, and the abnormally pointed crown may represent some sort of *cucullus*.

(xxxii) *Camerton.*[1]

This important head was found in a trench close to the foundations of a Roman house at Camerton, Somerset. Of fine white limestone, it is some 4 ins. high. It reveals all the features of Celtic cult heads having arresting eyes, no lids, deeply demarcated ears, long upper lip and a short nose. There is no neck. An unusual feature is the hair, which is represented by small squares all over the top of the head. Camerton is some 45 miles from Eype where the "phallic" head described on p. 23 was discovered.

(xxxiii) *Caerwent.*[2]

A sandstone head, some 9 ins. high and $4\frac{3}{4}$ ins. across the head was found on the floor of a shrine, having gravel steps and a clay floor. The head is flat at the back, and at the bottom, and was obviously meant to be viewed from the front alone. The neck of the head is thick-set, and clearly a native deity is represented. The eyeballs, which are prominent, are in relief and surrounded by an oval depression, the nose is very straight, the mouth small, ears deeply indented, almost slot-like. There is no hair. It is possible that the slots for ears were intended for the insertion of cervine or equine ears.

(xxxiv) *Caerhun* (*Kanovium*).[3]

A head crudely fashioned from a lump of sandstone, found on gravel in the courtyard of the Roman fort. The features are nearly flat, being indicated by a series of incisions. A deep line on the brow defines the hairline, and the hair is shown by a series of parallel incisions which run from just above the forehead to just above the nape of the neck. The nose is long and narrow, the eyes wide and the mouth straight and firm, giving an expression of severity to the face.

(xxxv) *Castlesteads.*[4]

A human head, roughly fashioned from a block of red sandstone $8\frac{1}{2}$ ins. long and 5 ins. wide was excavated at Castlesteads Woods. The features are crude, and no attempt at a naturalistic outline of the face was attempted. The features are indicated by straight lines, the mouth fashioned by two slits, and the large, square eyes have the pupils demarcated by slits. The straight hairline across the brow, side-whiskers and beard are indicated by pick marks.

(xxxvi) *Carlisle.*[5]

An impressive head worked from local sandstone was recovered from the Roman road near Appleby. It is not easy to date this head but it would seem to belong to the period of the Roman occupation, perhaps to the 3rd Century.

[1] *Ant. J.*, XVI, 205 ff. and 206 for illustration.
[2] Archæologia, 58, I, 150, fig. 7.
[3] Baillie Reynolds, *Kanovium*, 1938, 214.
[4] Haverfield, *Excavations on the Roman Wall*, Kendal, 1903, 348.
[5] In Tullie House Museum, Carlisle.

A later date would seem more probable than an early date. In many ways it resembles the magnificent horned head from Netherby (p. 17 *supra*), and likewise has features in common with the steelyard weight from Carlisle (p. 33 *infra*), and the pottery head from the same area (p. 17 *supra*). The head is unusually large, the skull powerful, the eyes and the mouth rendered in a manner similar to the Netherby head, the eyes narrowed, the cheeks flattened, the somewhat military appearance of the small beard and moustaches toning down the barbaric aspect of the features.

(xxxvii) *Corbridge* (*Corstopitum*).[1]

A male head carved from a sandstone block, measuring 7 ins. from crown to chin, and approximately $5\frac{3}{4}$ ins. from ear to ear. There is a deep cup in the top of the head for libations. The hair comes to a point above the nose. The brow is shallow and prominent, the eyes large and the pupils indicated by cuts. There are two pupils in the left eye. The nose is long and narrow, and the nostrils are demarcated. The mouth is small and slightly drooping, and the deep furrows which run from nose to mouth add emphasis to the austerity of the features. The cheeks are framed by side-whiskers, and there is a small pointed beard. The face is triangular in shape, and shares several features with the head from Boa Island, Ireland (p. 16 *infra*). This head, if not actually dating from a period prior to the occupation of the Romans, can hardly have been fashioned at a time when Roman influence was strong in this area, since it owes little to classical art conventions, but springs directly from La Tène traditions. The left eye is considerably larger than the right eye; this feature has already been commented on in connection with the Corbridge janiform head discussed *supra* p. 16.

(xxxviii) *Corbridge*.[2]

Another head from Corstopitum resembles head No. xxxvii in dignity of expression and austerity of execution. It is 7 ins. in height and again, is completely native in treatment. The features are in fairly low relief, the eyes large, nose long and narrow with little attempt to define the nostrils. The mouth is straight and severe, the severity of expression emphasised by lines under the eyes.

Corstopitum has thus yielded up five examples of "decapitated" heads, all native in workmanship and cult significance, each reflecting an individual aspect of the symbolism of the human head. One head is janiform, one is horned, another is fashioned on a phallic-shaped stone; of the two "simple" heads, one has a hollow in the top for libations. The cult of the head is thus well-documented in this area near the Wall (as it is throughout the general region), and all these heads may have been associated with the flourishing cult of Maponus. These heads may even ante-date the Roman occupation of the north, their similarity to the Irish heads making an early date by no means improbable, and this would provide some evidence for a native tradition of stone carving, although strictly limited, before the influence of Roman iconography.

[1] Richmond, *op. cit.*, pl. III, A.
[2] In the Roman Museum, Corstopitum.

(xxxix) *Lustymore, Ireland.*[1]

A large triangular head from Fermanagh rests on a small square body, the arms of which are weak and attenuated, while the legs are in the squatting position characteristic of the Gaulish Cernunnos. The beard is pointed, the eyes large, the nose long and narrow. The head seems to be without ears. The top of the head is damaged, thus it is not possible to discover whether the monument originally functioned as a shrine. This impressive head, which is similar in some ways to No. xxxvii *supra*, can be dated with a reasonable degree of confidence to somewhere about the turn of the Christian era.

(xl) *Chesters* (*Cilurnum*).[2]

Head, much worn, but of similar type to No. xxxviii *supra*. Carved in fairly low relief from a block of stone, it measures some 9 ins. in height. No hair is indicated, and the face appears to be clean-shaven. The eyes are large, the mouth thin and straight, the nose flat and rather wedge-shaped. No ears are depicted.

(xli) *Dumfries.*[3]

This head, fashioned of local pink sandstone is slightly less than life-size. It is female, and most probably represents a goddess. It is the work of a Celtic artist. It is not clear whether it formed part of a bust or a full-size statue, or whether it originated as an independent monument. The thickness of the neck may indicate that it had become detached from a base or pediment. The head-dress is remarkable, resembling a close-fitting bathing cap or hairnet. The eyes are large, the eyeballs flattened, the mouth long and slightly drooping. The nose and chin are damaged, and above each nostril there is a line curving inwards to form a spiral. The face is serious and dignified.

(xlii) *Gloucester* (*Glevum*).[4]

Male head fashioned from local chalk and showing traces of having been coloured red. It is 8 ins. high, and dates from the 2nd century A.D. It is a remarkable piece of native workmanship, made outstanding by the prominent eyes and utter sombreness of the expression of the incised features. The abundant hair is combed down onto the brow in points. The ears are very elaborately portrayed. The head was discovered during the excavation of the site of an extension to the Bon Marché buildings in 1934. A fine carved tablet of Mercury, his Celtic consort Rosmerta and another goddess was found nearby.

(xliii) *Towcester, Northants.*[5]

A female head, showing traces of classical art influence, but nevertheless completely native in concept and power of execution, dates from the 3rd century and was originally employed as an antefix. It undoubtedly represents a native goddess, having both religious and apotropaic importance. It is carved in one with its base, and no part of the neck is modelled. The style of hairdressing shows classical influence, but the Celtic love of pattern has caused the artist to fashion a

[1] Henry, *op. cit.*, pl. 4*a*.
[2] In the Roman Museum at Chesters.
[3] Toynbee, J. M. C., "A Roman (?)Head at Dumfries," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1952, XLII, 63 ff.
[4] *Transactions* of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archæological Society, 1934, 56, pl. VIII.
[5] Kendrick, T. D., *Anglo-Saxon Art*, 1938, pl. IX.

single strand of hair into a serpent-like spiral on either cheek, emerging from behind the well-defined ears. The eyes are enormous and compelling, the pupils indicated by means of deep holes. The brow is furrowed, the nose long and narrow, nostrils indicated, the mouth drooping, the chin broad. The entire base of the head is broad, and the artist has ceased to model it below the chin, which forms part of the base.

(xliv) *York (Eburacum).*[1]

This unusually large head, 2 ft. in height, was found at the bottom of an old wall in the Castlegate and purchased by the Museum in 1789. It is carved in one with the base, which is triangular in shape, the back of the head is unfashioned, and it seems that it either functioned as an antefix or as a head to be seen from the front only, in some religious shrine. It is male, has long, copious hair, the front hair rising into two horn-like peaks, the remainder of the hair forming thick strands below the ears, or rather to where the ears should be were they represented. In certain respects it resembles heads No. xliii and No. xli. In size and style it is remarkably impressive, being broad at the chin and narrowing up towards the brow, the cheeks sunken, all the features combining to impart intensity to the large, fairly close-set eyes. The mouth is firm, rather long and slightly drooping, somewhat reminiscent of the Dumfries head in this respect, as is the nose, now worn at the tip, the nostrils indicated by an upward-sweeping curve. The brow is slightly puckered, a most regular feature with these heads, and one which adds intensity to the expression which is invariably severe and penetrating. It is not easy to attach a date to this work, but it is possible that it is fairly late, possibly 3rd century or even 4th century A.D.

Apart from constituting complete monuments, heads also figure in other cult contexts, for example, on reliefs, as antefixa and on pottery objects having ritual importance.

2*a*. *Heads in Relief.*

(xlv) *Lanchester.*[2]

Relief in yellow sandstone, burnt red at the top left-hand corner, on which is a male head, having a neck, but with no trace of a body. The stone is 9 ins. by $8\frac{1}{4}$ ins. by 5 ins. The face is elongated and sombre in expression, having wide eyes, usual puckered brow, small straight mouth, lacking in ears and hair.

(xlvi) *Wallsend (Segedunum).*[3]

Fragment of a stone shield on which is a circular face in relief. The nose is wedge-shaped, the eyes compelling, and the cutting of the nose and brow in one gives an over-hanging effect to the forehead and imparts a scowling intensity to the gaze. The mouth is small, straight and severe. The hair is close-curled and extends down either side of the face to give the effect of side-whiskers. The

[1] In the Yorkshire Museum, York.
[2] Lapidarium Septentrionale, 714*a*.
[3] Collingwood Catalogue, No. 275.

treatment of this head resembles the circular masks on the diadem from Wilton-by-Hockwold, No. lxxii *infra*. Here again it seems that we are witnessing the amalgamation of native and classical concepts, namely the fusion of the *tête coupée* and the Gorgon head in a context where both would be equally applicable. The fragment, which is fashioned from brown sandstone, measures $15\frac{3}{4}$ ins. by $12\frac{1}{2}$ ins. by $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

(xlvii) *Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Somerset.*[1]

A rough stone on which a human head has been worked in relief. The face is almost circular, the eyes huge, no ears or hair are shown, the face is clean-shaven, the mouth small, the expression fixed and penetrating. It may be noted that No. lxvii also comes from the same locality.

(xlviii) *Birrens, Dumfriesshire.*[2]

A relief on which is a small, horned head having pronounced, austere features. The letters —IADII are visible on the lower half of the stone. It is possible that this head was connected with a cult similar to that testified to by the presence of several reliefs of armed, horned gods from the general Carlisle area, by the horned bust from Moresby, and by the horned head from Netherby, No. xii *supra*.

(xlix) *Edinburgh.*[3]

A torso, now in the National Museum, and believed to have formed part of the Camelon Collection, but not published, has a small human head of the type under discussion drawn in relief on the stomach. The figure is now headless and has lost both arms and legs. The head drawn on the stomach may perhaps be paralleled by such monuments as that from Entremont, where a male torso is decorated by a "decapitated" head from below which two serpentiform arms emerge.[4]

2*b*. *Antefixa.*

There are several antefixa which testify further to native predilection for the symbolism of the human head in matters of superstition and magical practice. It is in the context of antefixa, pottery objects generally and metalwork that British religious traditions seem to have lurked longest, undisturbed and perhaps less liable to classical influence and the confusions brought about by *interpretatio romana*. As these tiles are native in imagery and as they were attached to the eaves of buildings as amulets, they are of particular interest here. Only those on which a human head is figured will be discussed here, which means that some of the most striking tiles from the point of view of native religion must be ignored in this context.

[1] *Roman Britain*, British Museum Catalogue, London, 1951, 53, fig. 25.
[2] National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh. *C.I.L.* VII. 1079.
[3] National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.
[4] Lambrechts, *op. cit.*, pl. II, fig. 7.

(l) *Caerleon (Isca Silurum).*[1]

Triangular-shaped antefix, the decoration in high relief. A central rayed male face is surmounted by cat's ears. A six-spoked wheel is figured above the head, and two four-pointed stars are drawn below. This tile, in common with some seven others, all very similar to each other, is comparatively early in date, having been fashioned somewhere between the years 70–110 A.D. Several other tiles of similar type have neckless heads drawn on them in high relief, frequently radiate, some having cat's ears. These heads are associated with pine trees, wheels,

[1] *Caerleon Report on Excavations*, 1926–29, 20 ff.

The cat-ears on these heads are of interest. Cats sometimes figure on Gallo-Roman monuments in a funerary context, where they seem to be symbolic of some chthonic power. (v. *Le Chat dans la Statuaire Gallo-Romaine*, in Révue archæologique de l'est et du centre-est, Janvier-Juin, 1958, 128 ff.) They also may to occur on one plate of the Gundestrup cauldron (Muller, Sophus, *Le grand vase de Gundestrup en Jutland*, Nordiske Fortidsminder, Copenhagen 1890–1903, 62 ff., pl. VII). There is, moreover, a mythological Irish character known as Cairbre Cinn-cait, Cairbre of the cat-head. He is mentioned in the *Cóir Anman*, a composition dating in its present form from the 12th century, with archaisms that indicate earlier compositions, which discusses the epithets attached to heroes and mythological beings, and their appropriateness. Material of considerable mythological interest is embedded in this work. The relevant entry, in translation, is as follows:

"Cairbre Cinn Cait 'of the cat's head'," since it was a cat's head, that is the form or shape of a cat that was on his god. Or there were two cat's ears upon him, as said the poet, namely Eochaid ua Floinn:

Thus was Cairbre the cruel
who seized Ireland south and north
two cat's ears on his fair head
a cat's fur through his ears.

(*Coir Anman*, Stokes Irische Text, Leipzig and Windisch, 1897, 384, para. 241).

Again, in the story of Morann Mac Main's Collar, Cairbre is referred to as the cat-headed king of Ireland.

"Now Cairbre, Morann's father had a cat's snout, and every son that was born to him used to have a blemish so then he killed them. . . ."

(*The Irish Ordeals*, Irische Texte, 206, para. 12).

O'Rahilly (*Feil-sgribhinn EóinMhic Néill*, Dublin, 1940, 103) disagrees with the acceptance of Cairbre Cinn-cait as meaning cat-head. He holds that the form is *cattchenn*, standing for an earlier *cotutchenn*, meaning hard-head, this having something to do with his reputation for tyranny. He goes on to say, however, that it is hardly necessary to stress the fact ("which will be sufficiently obvious to those who have some knowledge of Celtic mythology") that Cairbre Cattchenn so far from being an historical character, is ultimately a divine personage, ancestor-deity of the Erainn (102). Thus while allowing that Cairbre is supernatural in origin, O'Rahilly regards as fantastic the explanation given in the *Cóir Anman* for his epithet Cat-head. While it is essential to use all vernacular references to pagan cults and divine personages with the utmost discretion, the tradition of such a being having animal ears is no more fantastic than the belief that the supernatural being should be capable of taking on animal form. When one bears in mind the numerous representations of divine beings from Gaul and Britain having such animal parts as horns, antlers, hooves and animal ears, and such figures from the vernacular tradition as Labhraidh Loingseach with his horse ears, it is surprising that O'Rahilly should take exception to a native explanation for a name, an explanation which is better attested in the superstitious tradition of the people than many of O'Rahilly's own religious hypotheses.

Again, in *Sanas Cormaic*, a glossary dating from the 9th century, a method of divination is described in which the flesh of a red pig, a dog or a cat is chewed, then an incantation is sung over it, and it is offered to "idol gods." (v. *Himbas Forosnai*, Sanas Cormaic, ed. Stokes, W., 1862). The pig and the dog we know to have played an important role in Celtic cult practices. The fact that the flesh of the cat is also included here imparts to it some status as a beast of divination.

These examples from the Irish vernacular tradition, in which much of genuine mythological significance is to be found, depict a mythological being, referred to as a god, having cat's ears. It is not of course suggested that there is an actual connection between the Irish character Cairbre Cat-head and the enigmatic being with the cat's ears on the Caerleon antefixa, but only that such a type of supernatural being would not be unparalleled in Celtic mythology.

pellet-like objects and crosses. The cross in association with a cult head has already been described in the notes on the Scottish tricephalos. Their similarity to each other makes it more convenient to group them all together under this single number, than to attach a separate number to each example.

(li) *Caerleon.*[1]

Antefix having a mask-like human face drawn on it in high relief. The chin is pointed, eyes enormous, as are the ears, and the hair is indicated by a straight line drawn across the brow, forming a cap-like coiffeur, comparable with head No. xxxiv, p. 24 *supra*, from Caerhun. Pine trees in groups of three surround the head. This tile dates from somewhere between the years 105–200 A.D.

(lii) *Silchester* (*Calleva*).[2]

An antefix, made from a local mould in baked clay, dates from the early 2nd century A.D. On it a male head is drawn in high relief, having a complex set of symbols. There is a thick fringe-like arrangement of the hair on the brow, being depicted by firm straight strokes from below the crown to the forehead, above which two strong bull-horns come from the centre of the head and lie horizontally above the fringed hair (*cf.* the atrophied horns on head No. xviii from Benwell). There are human ears in the normal position, while on top of the head are ears which appear to be feline, and an unusual crest-like decoration between these secondary ears. The lips are thick, and below the chin are traces of what may have been a beard, or writhing serpents, in which case the blending of native and classical concepts would once again be manifest. The antefix is triangular in shape. The eyes are, as usual, enormous.

(liii) *Dorchester.*[3]

A tile from Dorset has a similar male head in high relief on it, with large eyes, horned or cat-eared, and wreathed. Several other fragmentary examples from Dorchester and neighbourhood are all from one mould, and are of local manufacture. All these antefixa are fairly early in date.

2*c*. *Miscellaneous Pottery Objects.*

A further source of evidence for the symbolic use of the human head may be found in the so-called "face-urns." These urns are too numerous and the study of them too highly specialised to allow of more than a brief reference here. Two examples, which may be taken as typical are briefly described.

(liv) *Oxford.*[4]

A crude face-urn with three vertical handles a human nose corresponding to the fourth handle, this being flanked by two stamped circles for eyes. The same tool has been used to indicate a beard.

[1] *Caerleon Report on Excavations*, 1926–29, 20 ff.
[2] In the Reading Museum.
[3] *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1956, XLVI, 142, pl. XVI, 2.
[4] In the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

(lv) *Alchester.*[1]

A slightly different representation, more than a mere approximation to a human face being aimed at here, occurs on a jug from Alchester, where two well-defined, and menacing male faces are depicted.

Two further fragments of pottery which are of value in this study are described below.

(lvi) *Carlisle* (*Luguvalium*) [2] (Pl. VI).

Fragment of a large pitcher or vase found in Castle Street, Carlisle. It is decorated by a rudely modelled male head, the thin, drooping mouth giving an expression to the face which is reminiscent of the expressions of heads No. xii and No. xxxvi from this area. The fragment is fashioned of light red clay, and there is an interesting coronet and disc ornament on the head. Balls of clay with incised circle and dot for eyes and iris have been used, and there are raised bands with notched chevrons for side-whiskers, beard and moustache. This seems to represent a local deity.

(lvii) *Richborough.*[3]

A fragment of pottery is ornamented with the head of a horned female in low relief, and probably represents some local goddess. The features and expression may be compared with No. lxii from the same site.

3. *Metalwork.*

Bronzes and miscellaneous metal objects constitute an important source for Celtic religious symbolism. Although small in size, these objects are frequently early in date, based on superb traditions of native metallurgy, and some are of major importance here.

(lviii) *Aylesford, Kent.*[4]

It was customary to bury buckets and cauldrons, often elaborately decorated, in the graves of Celts of noble birth, thus implying that these objects themselves had a ritual significance. The most dramatic bucket escutcheons in the shape of human heads come from Aylesford, and date from the 1st century B.C. They are probably Gaulish imports and furnish a fine example of the Celtic *tête coupée* concept. The face is withdrawn and self-contained in expression, finely modelled and dignified, this air of dignity accentuated by the impressive helmet with its high crest, and by the huge, closed eyes, the long geometric nose, sunken cheeks and straight, firm mouth.

[1] In the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

[2] I am indebted to Mr Robert Hogg, Keeper of Tullie House Museum for this photograph and for kind permission to publish it.

[3] Richborough Report, IV, pl. XLII, No. 347.

[4] Leeds, E. T., *Celtic Ornament*, Oxford, 1933, 39, fig. 16.

(lix) *Brough-on-Humber* (*Petuaria*).[1]

A bucket, recovered from the grave of a British noble, hooped in iron, with bronze escutcheons modelled as human heads. The heads are male, necks short and firm, the heads are broad, jaws prominent, lips pursed, noses broad and straight and brows jutting. The hair is thick and combed straight down in native fashion. The chins are emphasised by a small beard.

(lx) *Welwyn* (*Herts*).[2]

Three heads, which functioned as mounts on a metal bowl, from a burial; La Têne in style, resembling the "decapitated" heads, with hair combed down on to the brow, eyes seemingly closed, and having well-defined moustaches and beards.

(lxi) *Aldborough* (*Isurium Brigantum*).[3]

Bronze terret in form of a male bust; from the sides of the head spring great horns, while a projection in the centre of the head may represent a third horn, or may be associated with the leaf-crown, now almost destroyed, which originally emerged from the back of the head. The face is moustached, this giving added severity to the drooping mouth; the eyes are enormous with large pupils which must have been enamelled at one time, the ferocity of the gaze emphasised by the furrowed brow. A date shortly before 71 A.D. has been proposed for this work.

(lxii) *Richborough, Kent.*[4]

Fitting of a bronze attachment for a basin handle decorated with a human face, surmounted by bull-horns which terminate in knobs. Although knobbed horns are found especially in early Iron Age contexts, this is a feature which survived the conquest, and this fitment may date from the period immediately after the Roman occupation. The basin to which the handle was attached is likely to have had ritual significance.

(lxiii) *Richborough.*[5]

Bronze fitment consisting of a piece of tubing covered with palmette patterns. One end is closed by a terminal composed of the masks of two women set back to back, Janus-fashion. A necklace divides tube and neck. The faces are identical, the only difference being that of position, one face looking upwards. The modelling is fairly crude. The women wear fillets in their hair. Artistically these females, who are probably goddesses, resemble the female busts on the back of the three-horned bull from Maiden Castle, Dorset.[6]

(lxiv) *Marlborough* [7] (*Wilts.*).

Vat, 21½ ins. high, nearly 2 ft. in diameter which must have contained some sort of alcoholic liquid for feasts of a ritual nature. The sides are decorated with bronze heads, reminiscent of the heads on the Gundestrup cauldron and sacred beasts. It is believed to have been imported round about the year 50 B.C. The eyes of the "god" head must have been set with coral or enamel.

[1] *Ant. J.*, XV, 459.
[2] Sir Cyril Fox, *Pattern and Purpose in Celtic Art*, Cardiff, 1958, pl. 33.
[3] Richmond, I. A., "Queen Cartimandua," *Journal of Roman Studies*, XLIV. pl. II. 2.
[4] Richborough Report, X, pl. X, No. 17.
[5] Richborough Report, IV, pl. XLV, No. 172.
[6] Wheeler, R. E. M., Maiden Castle, Dorset, Oxford, 1943, pl. XXXI.
[7] Fox, *op. cit.*, pl. 34.

(lxv) *Old Carlisle* [1] (Pl. VI).

Bronze steelyard weight in the shape of a male head. Two ins. high, it is filled with lead and weighs some 5 oz. The face is almost square in shape, the broad chin heavily bearded, the thick hair extending down the cheeks to blend with the beard. The moustache is thick and drooping, the nose flat and wedge-shaped. The eyes are heavy and narrowed (a feature found in several examples of heads from Cumberland), the eyebrows pronounced. The lips are thick, and give the impression of being slightly pouted. The hair is thick on top of the head and divided into strands. Two of these may represent some sort of atrophied horns, but this is not unambiguous.

(lxvi) *Furness.*[2]

A bronze mask, having typical Celtic features, and turned into a weight by Vikings who tore it from its base (British Museum).

(lxvii) *Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Somerset.*[3]

Bronze mask, having extremely large eye-sockets, a drooping mouth, and curiously arranged hair, which is treated in a manner which is reminiscent of head No. lvi.; that is in a chevron pattern.

(lxviii) *Stanwick, Yorkshire.*[4]

Bronze bowl with mask of highly-stylised human face on it, reminiscent of the treatment of some of the faces on the Gundestrup cauldron.[5] Dating from about the 1st century A.D.

(lxix) *Thealby, Lincs.*[6]

Bronze handle mount in the centre of which is a human face. Eyes narrowed or closed, having side-whiskers and short beard, mouth small and straight, hair arranged in native fashion, two atrophied bull-horns above the brow. From the same trench came two bronze escutcheons in the form of bulls' heads from which an eagle emerges. Probably 1st century A.D.

(lxx) ?*Ribchester* (*Ribble*), *Yorkshire.*[7]

Triple-headed bronze mount, consisting of three flat-backed heads. A hawk emerges from a bull's head, the horns of which are knobbed. On the back is a human head, with a typical, rather sombre expression, and stylised treatment of the hair. The bird-head is dominant, and this complex has clear symbolic significance. This mount may be compared with that from Thealby (No. lxix *supra*).

[1] In Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1957, pl. XV.
[2] Henry, *op. cit.*, pl. 49*e*.
Leeds, *op. cit.*, fig. 29*b*.
[4] *British Museum Guide to Iron-Age Antiquities*, 141.
[5] *Op. cit.*, note 62.
[6] *Ant. J.*, xv, pl. LXXI.
[7] *Ant. J.*, 1954, pl. XXIV and 225.

(lxxi) *Rotherley, Dorset.*[1]

An object of bronze in the form of a goose with a human head on its back. The hair runs in parallel strokes from brow to crown and the face appears to be bearded and to have side-whiskers. The eyes of the bird and of the man are enormous, and form deep cavities which were originally set with some substance such as glass. The function of this object is unknown but the symbolism is not unique. One of the most important pagan sanctuaries in Gaul was at Roquepertuse. The *portico* was decorated with decapitated human heads, all male, and none seemingly over 40 years of age. Horses are figured, and the whole portico was surmounted by a large goose in the round. The dominant position occupied by this bird is indicative of its importance in the Roquepertuse cult, and it is associated with human heads, as is the little bronze goose from Rotherley. Again, the janiform head from Roquepertuse has a great beak surmounting it and forming a division between the two heads. Human masks are frequently used with stylized duck-heads on La Tène metalwork.

Birds and heads are associated again in the traditions of the Irish war/raven goddesses. The following entry occurs in Cormac's Glossary: [2]

> "Macha, that is a crow; or it is one of the three Morrignas. *Mesrad Machae, Macha's* mast, that is the heads of men after their slaughter."

Thus the *heads* of the dead would seem to have been this battle goddesse's due. Archæological evidence has revealed that in Gaul at least one altar to a native war deity under the guise of Mars had decapitated heads placed under it indicating that these had been rendered up to the deity as an offering.[3] Again, the legend of the head of Bran the "Blessed Raven" is one of the most convincing pieces of vernacular evidence for the veneration of the human head and its use as a talisman. The wonderful head of the blessed raven would fit well into this argument, but although the name *Bran* incontestably means "raven" there is no convincing evidence from textual sources to show that he was a raven god in origin, although attempts to come to this conclusion have been made.[4]

It can thus be shown that although the little Rotherley bronze is a most unusual object, the association of a decapitated head with a goose or raven, both birds of war, is not unknown in related Celtic tradition.

(lxxii) *Wilton-by-Hockwold, Norfolk.*[5]

A bronze crown for priest or cult figure was ploughed up together with five sheet-bronze diadems in Norfolk, a little to the north of the Ouse, in 1956. Both diadems and crown are particularly interesting in that they cast some light on the accessories of cult. It is significant that this ritual crown, which was placed on the head of the deity or his priest, is decorated by medallions on which male "decapitated" heads are figured in relief. These heads are very impressive, one resembling the Gundestrup heads, and others having the eyes closed in typical

[1] Pitt-Rivers, *Excavations at Rotherley*, pl. CIII.

[2] *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. Stokes, xxxv.

[3] An altar from Apt is inscribed *Marti Vectirix Reppavi* f.v.s.l.m. The names of the dedicants are Celtic. Under the altar eight or nine male skulls were placed showing a dedication of human heads to the war-god in Roman times. (*C.I.L.* XII, 1077).

[4] v. Krappe, A. H., "Les Dieux au Corbeau chez les Celtes," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 114, 236 ff.

[5] *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1957, 211.

tête coupée fashion. In each case the hair is closely curled, the curls continuing down the cheeks to form the beard. Here then we have a twofold stressing of the importance of the head, heads decorating a ritual object to be placed on the head.

(lxxiii) *Farley Heath, Surrey.*[1]

A priest's sceptre found in the remains of a Romano-Celtic temple, consisting of a narrow strip of bronze attached to an iron head. The decoration consists of animals, human figures and symbols and the entire design is clearly Celtic. The deity is depicted in full, naked and phallic. A neckless human head, with generous moustaches, wears a helmet with cheek-pieces, and below this head is a wheel. The association of a human head with a wheel is also found on some of the Caerleon antefixa, see p. 29 *supra*.

The first part of this paper has been concerned with a description of the various ways in which the representation of the human head is used in Celtic and Romano-Celtic contexts, as an independent feature, or to decorate objects having a cult or magical significance. Using the Scottish tricephalos as a starting point, we have attempted to show how the cult of the head was a deep-rooted, ancient and enduring feature of Celtic superstitious practice, and how, right up to the time of the collapse of Roman political influence in Britain, this feature persists and remains firmly rooted, in spite of the impact of Roman native cults. We can trace the history of this superstitious veneration of the head from the magnificent La Tène metalwork, where the human head occurs with impressive frequency, through the early examples of stone carving by native artists, to the final triumphant blend of Roman technical skill with native imagination in the splendid antefix from Towcester, where the two traditions have united to make an impressive work of art.

It is clear then that in Celtic and Romano-Celtic contexts, the human head was deeply symbolic. In some instances, the head undoubtedly represented some specific deity. In other instances it may have stood for a more abstract concept of divinity and supernatural powers. It may be noted that monuments in the form of heads are not accompanied by the name of any specific god. The labelling of religious monuments is a classical feature, and the Celts, like other primitive peoples, were superstitious about the use and abuse of personal names. A recurrent formula in the early Irish vernacular tradition is "tongu do dia tongas mo thuath" "I swear by the god by whom my people swears." The name of no individual god is used in these oaths. It is, therefore, no cause for surprise that even during the Roman occupation in Britain, when names were being attached to native monuments and dedications were being made to native gods, this universal Celtic symbol of divinity and apotropaic power should remain nameless.

The second part of this paper will consist of an attempt to discover

[1] *Ant. J.*, XVIII, 391 ff.

whether this well-documented iconographic feature has left any traces in a vernacular tradition which, although compiled some centuries after the advent of Christianity to Ireland, does contain fragments of earlier, pre-Christian superstitious beliefs and rites. The Welsh tradition is later, and has been under stricter ecclesiastic censorship than was the case with the Irish material, but even so, it too does occasionally bear convincing testimony to earlier customs and beliefs.

Part II.

The Human Head in Irish and Welsh Vernacular Tradition.

Little suggestive of actual worship was ever allowed to penetrate the early literary tales, and the most we can hope for is an occasional oblique reference to some belief or ritual practice. When the occasional fragment of evidence does get through to us, the material remains are invaluable when they can augment and substantiate it. No statement is anywhere made that the Irish or Welsh at any time believed their gods to manifest themselves in the form of a head, or a multiple head. There are however several references to characters having multiple heads or marvellous heads. Occurring in literary contexts, the terms in which they are described strongly suggest traditions at one time current of a kind similar to those documented by the iconography. Since the Scottish tricephalos is the focal point for this enquiry, traditions about multiple-headed beings will be examined first.

1. *Multiple Heads.*

(a) *Ellén Trichend.*[1]

The Cave of Cruachan, believed in Christian times to be a gateway into Hell, was traditionally associated with the otherworld of pagan tradition. A series of malevolent beings used to emerge from it periodically, and one of these was known as *in tEllén trechend*, three-headed Ellen. This creature used to devastate the whole of Ireland until finally slain in single combat by Amairgein. O'Rahilly [2] identifies this Ellén with Aillén mac Midgna of the sìd of Finnachad, who used to burn Tara every *samain* until destroyed by Finn. The name he takes to be a derivative of Ailill, sometimes spelt Elill, standing for Aillill, meaning a spirit or an elf. This identification is open to question, but in this otherworld three-headed being, possessing great powers of destruction, we do seem to have an echo of some tradition similar to that which caused the Celts at an earlier period to represent their gods in tricephalic form.

[1] *Revue Celtique*, XIII, 448, 15.
[2] O'Rahilly, T. F., *Early Irish History and Mythology*, Dublin, 1946, 300.

(b) *Garb of Glen Rige.*[1]

A two-headed being, the heads being set on a single neck, figures in the story entitled "Aided Guill mac Carbada ocus Aided Gairb Glinne Rige." Cuchulainn meets the two-headed Garb in single combat. The fight is fierce and both contestants are wounded. Cuchulainn finally cuts Garb's double head from off his neck and impales it on a sharpened stake.

(c) *Cimbe Cetharchend.*[2]

Several slight references to a four-headed mythical figure occur in the Irish tradition, but no explanations for his name are offered. Loch Cimme was traditionally named after him, pointing perhaps to his origin as a local deity of some sort. He is referred to in the *Book of Invasions* in the following terms:

> "This is the advice which he adopted:
> against Ross he set Rind;
> against Conall Cernach of many pledges
> he set Cimme four-heads."

It may be noted that in this tradition Conall Cernach opposes Cimbe Fourheads, while Conall Cernach's father, Amairgein, was traditionally reputed to have slain the three-headed Ellén. A reference to the naming of the loch after Cimbe also occurs in the *Book of Invasions*:

> ". . . Loch Cimme, from Cimme the four-headed, son of Umor, was it named."

2. "*God*" *Heads.*

(d) *The Head of Bran the Blessed.*[3]

That Bran "Raven" was a deity in origin is evident from the qualities and powers attributed to him. He is described as being so enormous in size that no house could ever contain him. When he goes to attack Ireland and avenge the ill-treatment of his sister Branwen, messengers come to her and ask her to interpret for them the meaning of the unfamiliar objects they have seen approaching their land. They ask her "what was the mountain that could be seen alongside the ships?" "Bendigeidfran, my brother," she said, "coming by wading. There was never a ship in which he might be contained." "What was the lofty ridge and the lake on each side of the ridge?" "He," she said, "looking towards this island; he is angered. The two lakes on each side of the ridge are his two eyes, one on each side of his nose."

After the Welsh and the Irish have virtually exterminated each other in a fight, seven Welshmen alone escape, Bran amongst them, mortally wounded. He commands his companions to cut off his head and take it with them on their travels, and he prophesies how things will go with them in the future. He tells them: "In Harddlech you will be feasting seven years and the birds of Riannon singing to you. And the head will be as pleasant company to you as ever it was at best when it was on me. And at Gwales in Penfro you will be fourscore years;

[1] *Revue Celtique*, XIV, 398 ff. edited from the *Book of Leinster*.
[2] MacAlister, R. A. S., *Lebor Gabala Érenn, IV*, Dublin, 1941, 70, 110.
[3] *Branwen Uerch Lyr*, Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi, ed. Williams, Ifor, Cardiff, 1930, 29 ff., 40.

and until you open the door towards Aber Henfelen, the side facing Cornwall, you may bide there, and the head with you uncorrupted. But from the time you have opened that door, you may not bide there; make for London to bury the head. And do you cross over to the other side." And then his head was struck off, and they set out for the other side, these seven, and the head with them, and Branwen the eighth . . . and there they passed the fourscore years so that they were not aware of having ever spent a time more joyous and delightful than that. It was not more irksome than when they came there nor could any tell by his fellow that it was so long a time. Nor was it more irksome having the head with them than when Bendigeidfran had been with them alive. And because of those fourscore years it was called the Assembly of the Wondrous Head.

The talismanic qualities of this supernatural head are illustrated by the following statement: ". . . they came to London and buried the head in the White Mount. And when it was buried that was one of the Three Happy Concealments, and one of the Three Unhappy Disclosures when it was disclosed, for no plague would ever come across the sea so long as the head was in that concealment."

This legend, appearing in a medieval Welsh tale, is unique in containing verbal verification of all that is implicit in the material representations of the human head. Bran is clearly a god in origin, and the story of the decapitation is probably a later rationalisation of an original cult legend about a wonderful supernatural head. In this head are combined all the powers with which the human head was accredited by the Celts. It is apotropaic (it averts danger of invasion); it is prophetic (it reveals future events); it is divine (it presides over the Otherworld feast at which the wonderful birds of Riannon, the Great Queen, British equivalent of the Gaulish horse goddess Epona, sing ceaselessly). The name Bendigeitfran, Blessed Raven, carries a Christian connotation. It is probable that originally the element *Pen* was present, the original name being Bran the . . . Head.[1]

(e) *The Head of Fergal Mac Maile Duin.*[2]

An oblique reference to actual worship of the human head occurs in the Irish story *Cath Almaine*, preserved in the 11th-century *Yellow Book of Lecan*. The Leinstermen fight a battle against Fergal Mac Maile Duin, who is slain. Fergal's head is taken to Cathal. Cathal honoured the head, causing it to be washed and braided and combed smooth, and a cloth of silk to be put about it, and seven oxen and seven wethers and seven pigs were cooked and placed before Fergal's head. The head blushed in the presence of the Munstermen and opened its eyes to God to give thanks for the reverence and great honour that had been shown it.

Although concerned with characters living well within the Christian era, and although the episode is given a Christian slant (the head giving thanks to God), this strange episode suggests earlier traditions of the actual worship of heads evidenced by the placing of animal offerings before it. The fact that it is given a feast in its honour suggests memories of traditions of divine heads (such as we have seen in the case of the head of Bran) presiding at otherworld festivities.

The war goddess is also associated with the head of Fergal in the following verse:[3]

> "At midday in Allen, contending for the cattle of Brega, the red-mouthed, sharp-countenanced Badb uttered a shout of exultation round Fergal's head."

[1] Bromwich, R., "The Welsh Triads," *Arthurian Legend in the Middle Ages*, ed. Loomis, 44 ff.
[2] *Revue Celtique*, 24, p. 54, para. 14.
[3] *Op. cit.*, 54, para. 14.

The Badb was one of the three Irish war/fertility goddesses who frequently appeared in bird form (see p. 34 *supra* for further details of these goddesses' association with decapitated heads).

(f) *The Head of Donn Bo.*[1]

Another account of the continued existence of a decapitated head is also contained in the story of the battle of Almu. A young man, Donn Bo, famed for his sweet singing was slain in the battle and decapitated. He had promised to sing that night for Fergal his lord no matter where they should be. One of the victorious Leinstermen goes out onto the battlefield in order to take a head back to the feasting-place as a trophy. As he approaches, he hears the severed heads entertaining the dead king on the field. The voice of Donn Bo is sweeter than the voice of any other head. When the warrior approaches to lift his head, the head checks him, and says it is pledged to sing for Fergal alone that night. Nevertheless he lifts the head, and taking it back to the building, places it on a pillar. It is asked to sing. It turns its face to the wall so that it is in darkness and sings so sweetly that all weep. It is finally taken back to the battlefield.

In this tale then, a decapitated head is placed on a pillar, it entertains at a feast, and sings with such power that all who listen weep. It has the power of speech, and of movement, turning away from the audience to which it does not wish to sing. It is significant that in this same tale we have another example of a decapitated head treated with utmost reverence, decked and adorned, the finest of animals cooked and placed before it as an offering, at which point it speaks and thus indicates that it is capable of life independent of its body. It seems undeniable therefore that this tale, dealing with historical characters in a historical context has attracted to itself elements belonging to a purely pagan society, which show genuine traces of the veneration which was at one time accorded to the human head.

(g) *The Head of Lomna.*[2]

The story of Lomna's head furnishes another example of a head speaking at a feast. Lomna was Finn's fool. By chance he came upon Finn's wife in the act of committing adultery with a warrior called Coirpre. Finn's wife begs Lomna not to betray her, but he is faithful to his master, and does so. Coirpre decapitates Lomna in revenge for the betrayal. He takes the head of Lomna away with him. Finn finds the trunk, and placing his finger in his mouth, divines that it belongs to Lomna. He sets out to find the head. He comes upon Coirpre cooking salmon in a cooking-house, and Lomna's head is stuck on a spit beside him. Coirpre, when dividing out the fish, omits to offer any to the head. The head speaks. This happens twice and the head is put outside the door. The third distribution is made and the head speaks from outside.

3. *Speaking Heads and Prophetic Heads.*

(h) *The Head of Conaire Mor.*[3]

This legendary king of Ireland has many links with mythology, tradition making him the son of a bird/man, and a woman who was daughter of Etain, one time wife of the mythical Mider of Bri Leith. Conaire is trapped into breaking

[1] *Op. cit.*

[2] *Sanas Cormaic*, 34, v. *Orc treith.*

[3] "Togail Bruidne Da Derga," ed. Knott, Eleanor, Dublin, 1936, from the *Yellow Book of Lecan.*

all the prohibitions placed upon him when he was about to become king, and he is slain in a hostelry which is treacherously attacked by his three foster-brothers. The forces of the otherworld are heavily weighted against Conaire. He desires water during the attack, and Mac Cecht goes to get water for him, but the water supply of Ireland has been magically dried up. He is a supernatural being himself, and he ultimately obtains water for the king, but on returning with it, finds the king already decapitated. He pours the water into the mouth of the severed head, and the head speaks.

(i) *The Head of Fothad Canainne.*[1]

Fothad Canainne was one of three sons born at a single birth and all named Fothad. There are many examples in the Irish tradition of triple births, the same name being given to each son. According to tradition, Fothad's other name was *Caindia*, "Fair God." Fothad Canainne never sat down to a feast without decapitated heads before him. He possessed a war-band, and waged constant war against Ailill Flann Bec of Munster and his followers. Fothad was more shapely than Ailill, but Ailill's wife was more beautiful than Fothad's wife. He makes an assignation with her, and abducts her. Ailill pursues them with his warriors and Fothad falls and is decapitated. Ailill's wife lifts up Fothad's head, and it sings a long extempore poem to her, lamenting its state and instructing her to return home and take Fothad's material possessions with her.

(j) *A Prophetic Head in a Barra Tradition.*[2]

The tradition that heads sometimes have supernatural powers is also to be found in local legends current at the present time. The following tale was obtained in the island of Vatersay, near Barra, in the summer of 1956, from a woman who is unusually gifted in local legends and song texts. A Barra man was going to bury the heads of his three sons who had been slain. He was carrying the heads in a sack. As they passed a standing stone in the Cliait district, one of the heads spoke and made prophetic statements. One of these was to disclose the way in which the deaths should be avenged. The father was to go to a certain township in the island, where he would find a man whose daughter was pregnant to the son whose head was speaking. She would give birth to a son, who would avenge the deaths of the three brothers. The father did as the head advised, and in due course the son was born. One day, when the boy was about fourteen years of age, he was helping at a fanking of sheep. The murderer of his father and uncles was also present. This man asked the boy to go to the well and get some water for him to drink. The boy did this but on his return deliberately let the cup fall and it broke. The man then went to drink directly from the well. The boy followed him and as he bent down to drink drew a short sword which he had concealed in his sleeve and decapitated the murderer. The head was left in the well. It is of interest to note that it was only when the head is in close proximity to the standing stone that it speaks and makes prophetic statements. There may have been an earlier tradition, confused in transmission, that the head was taken to the stone pillar and placed upon it and that it spoke.

[1] *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*, Todd Lecture Series, XVI, *Fianaigecht*, ed. Kuno Meyer, 4 ff.

[2] This is a synopsis of a story told in Gaelic by Miss Nan MacKinnon (Nan Eachainn Fhionnlaigh) of Baile Vatersay.

4. *Vengeful Heads.*

There are one or two accounts of decapitated heads with powers of speech and movement, acting in an antagonistic way and endangering the living.

(k) *Suibhne Geilt and the Heads.*[1]

One of the grimmest and most dramatic accounts of decapitated heads behaving in an aggressive fashion occurs in the Irish tale of Suibhne Geilt. The relevant passages are as follows:

> ". . . when Suibhne came to the centre of Sliabh Fuaid he stopped still there, and a strange apparition appeared to him about midnight; even trunks, headless and red, and heads without bodies, and five bristling, rough-grey heads without body or trunk among them, screaming and leaping this way and that about the road. When he came among them he heard them talking to each other, and this is what they were saying: 'He is a madman,' said the first head, 'a madman of Ulster,' said the second head, 'follow him well,' said the third head, 'may the pursuit be long,' said the fourth head, 'until it reaches the sea,' said the fifth head. They rose together towards him. He soared aloft in front of them . . . great now was the terror, the crying and wailing, the screaming and crying aloud, the din and tumult of the heads after him as they were clutching and eagerly pursuing him. Such were the force and swiftness of that pursuit that the heads leapt on his calves, his houghs, his thighs, his shoulders and the nape of his neck so that the impact of head against head, and the clashing of all against the sides of trees and the tops of rocks, against the surface and the earth . . . nor did they cease until he escaped from them into the filmy clouds of the sky."
>
> "Once as I passed over Sliabh Fuaid on a black, dark, gloomy night,
> on a hill I beheld five heads having been cut off in one place."

Although this extraordinary episode occurs here purely as a literary fantasy, there is sufficient evidence to show that these "five bristling, rough-grey heads" with their power of speech and independent movement, have many antecedents in Celtic tradition, and represent in this context the crystallisation in a literary setting of an ancient Celtic belief in the potency of the decapitated head.

(l) *Colann gun Cheann.*[2]

An interesting parallel to the head episode in *Suibhne Geilt* occurs in a local tradition concerning a song supposedly made by a spectre which took the form of a headlesss body (colann gun cheann). Like Suibhne, the Headless Body who originally belonged to Trotternish in Skye, had a dislike for his fellow creatures, and because of his wickedness was banished to the mainland, and took up his abode near Arisaig. When the inhabitants there discovered his evil habits, they killed and decapitated him. He then became a highly malevolent and dangerous spectre. He used to float in the air above a narrow pass, and throw his head at people who had to traverse it, killing them by this means. A young man finally caught the descending head on the point of his sword, and only returned it to the Headless Body on the condition that the ghost went back to Trotternish.

[1] *Buile Suibhne*, ed. J. G. O'Keeffe, London, 1913, 122, 130.

[2] This tradition was recorded in Kilmuir by the School of Scottish Studies, and by F. Tolmie in the *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, 1911, xvi, 186–7.

(m) *The Knight of the Red Shield.*[1]

In one version of the Scottish Gaelic tale of *The Knight of the Red Shield* the following episode occurs:

> "One looked hither and one thither, and they saw a head coming in a flame of fire, and another head singing the song of songs. A fist was struck on the door of the mouth of the king, and a tooth was knocked out of him, and there was no button of gold or silver on the coat of the king but showered off him with shame. The head did this three years after each other, and then it went home."

This is an example of the persistence of an earlier tradition in a purely folklore context.

Conclusions.

To sum up, the iconographic evidence to which attention has been drawn above, supported by the vernacular tradition, points unequivocally to the cult of the head as an object of worship, as a symbol of divinity and regenerative power, and as a focus of superstitious belief in the period just prior to and during the Roman occupation of Britain. It has been shown that heads figure as monuments in themselves, and that they also appear as decorations forming part of more important objects having a ritual significance such as bowls, vats, buckets and cauldrons. These heads may be depicted in a variety of ways; they may have two or three faces or heads; they may be horned, or apparently equated with the classical Gorgon head; their powers of regeneration and repelling evil are demonstrated in contexts where they are clearly linked with the phallus; the face itself may be triangular, square, entirely circular, or broad at the base and narrow at the brow. It may be moustached and bearded, or clean shaven. The head may have abundant hair on it, or none at all. Ears may be exaggeratedly portrayed, or lacking altogether. The head may have a cup in the top to receive libations, thus testifying to its function as an independent shrine. These examples serve to indicate the various ways in which this native concept manifests itself in religious iconography at an early period, and through the maze of miscellaneous evidence, and the variety of representational traditions, clear patterns emerge. The weight of evidence enables us to conclude that, equally with Gaul, Britain and Ireland shared in this fundamental Celtic concept of the human head as a symbol of the life-force, and of the powers of the other world.

It is clear then that this Scottish tricephalos constitutes further evidence for what is already firmly attested, and it is likely that it is early in date. Found in Scotland, but small and therefore easily portable, it may have been brought over to this country by Gauls escaping from the Romans.

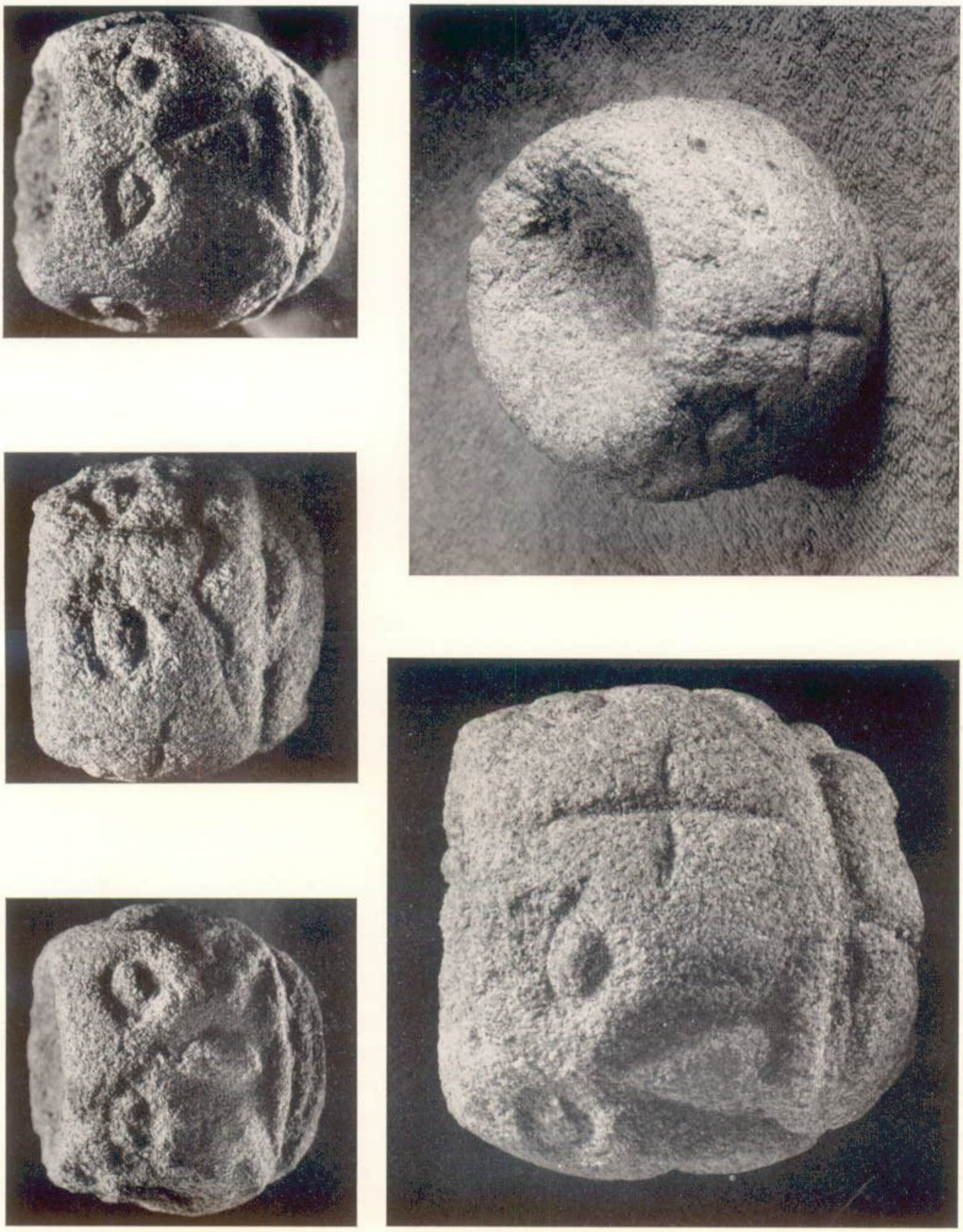
[1] Campbell, J. F., *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, Edinburgh, 1860, II, 469.

Again, it may have been fashioned in Britain by Gauls or by native Britons, or it may have found its way over to Scotland from Ireland at an earlier or later date. The attention drawn in recent years to several very impressive tricephaloid monuments from Denmark [1] all of apparently early date provides yet another possible place of origin, if not of actual manufacture for this head, and in this case it could well have reached Scotland in Viking times. These are speculations which the geographical identification of the stone from which the tricephalos is fashioned may help to clarify, but the vital point is that this little three-faced shrine provides further proof of the cult status of the human head in Gaul and in the British Isles.

Since completing this paper, my attention has been drawn by Mr Robert Hogg of the Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, to another head of the type with which we are concerned, which was excavated in the autumn of 1958 at Brougham in Westmorland. It is a fragment of a canopied tombstone in native style which was recovered from the cemetery site of the Roman fort at Brougham. I am indebted to Mr Robert Hogg for kind permission to publish this photograph and for this information (Pl. VI). I am indebted to the Carnegie Trust whose generous support makes this programme of research possible, and amongst others to the Keepers of the following museums for kind co-operation, photographs and permission to publish photographs: Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh; Dr David Smith, Joint Museum of Roman Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne; Mr Robert Hogg, Tullie House Museum, Carlisle; Mr Wymer, Reading Museum; Pastor Høgsbro Østergaard, Glejbjerg, for much information and photographs of Danish material. I am particularly grateful to Dr Winifred Temple for many profitable discussions and information, and to Professor Stuart Piggott for generous help and co-operation in all aspects of my research.

Plates III and IV were kindly photographed, on my behalf, by Miss K. M. Dickie, F.S.A.Scot., and Mr Malcolm Murray, Department of Prehistoric Archæology, Edinburgh University. Other photographs are reproduced by kind permission of Mr Robert Hogg, Tullie House Museum, Carlisle; Dr Joseph Rafferty, National Museum of Ireland; Mr W. Bulmer, Corstopitum Museum, Corbridge; Dr David Smith, Joint Museum of Roman Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

[1] Østergaard, K. Høgsbro, *En Trehovedet Gud? Kuml*, 1954, 55 ff.



Scottish Tricephalis

Anne Ross.

Horned head from Carvoran.

Janus-faced figure from Boa Island.

Tricephalos from Corleck, Co. Cavan.

Anne Ross.

Head from Corstopitum.

Horned figure from Lanchester.

Head from Corstopitum.

Head from Killavilla, Co. Roscrea.

Anne Ross.

Steelyard weight from Carlisle.

Head from Brougham.

Pottery head from Carlisle.