The Pictish Latin inscription at Tarbat in Ross-shire

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SUMMARY

The paper examines an inscribed and decorated fragment of a Dark Age stone monument (perhaps a cross-slab) found at Tarbat in Ross-shire and now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (no 1B 286). A revised reading of the damaged inscription is given. The inscription is funerary and commemorates an individual whose name is partly illegible. No reconstruction of the name is offered, but, as it does not appear to be Celtic, Latin or Anglo-Saxon, it is probably Pictish. The formulae used in the inscription are analysed and close comparisons are found in Wales and on the Isle of Man. The lettering is derived from the display script of Insular manuscripts and appears to be descended from that used in the Lindisfarne Gospels of c 700. The decorative treatment of the lettering is closer to manuscripts of about the second half of the 8th century. The unusual use of raised lettering in an inscription in stone is discussed and attention is drawn to the occurrence of the technique in Rome at the begining of the 8th century and in the 6th century in Constantinople. The surviving area of spiral ornament is compared to Pictish sculpture belonging to Anderson's Class II in Easter Ross and also to carved spirals in southern Ireland and Midland England. In conclusion a date towards the end of the 8th century is suggested for the Tarbat fragment and the lettering of the inscription is seen as an example of the Northumbrian influences detectable in 8th-century Pictland.

INTRODUCTION

One of the finest pieces of carved lettering to survive from Dark Age Britain is that on a stone which was first recorded in the 19th century built into the wall of the manse garden at Tarbat in Ross-shire and which is now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (catalogue no 1B 286). The stone (pl 26) is a fragment from a larger monument and its remaining decoration is comparable with sculpture in the immediate vicinity attributable to the later Pictish period. The lettering is almost unique among surviving British and Irish Dark Age inscriptions in being carved in relief and not incised. Although incomplete, this Latin inscription is the longest comprehensible inscription to survive from the time of the Picts. It is also, in the probable absence of surviving manuscripts, the longest written document of any sort to survive in its original form. (It has been shown that the Book of Kells could have been written and decorated in an ecclesiastical centre in the Pictish East of Scotland (Brown 1972; cf Henderson 1982), and more definite evidence of Pictish literary activity is provided by the post-Pictish lists of Pictish kings, which are thought to be based on sources dating back to the Pictish period (Henderson 1967, 161–68; Anderson 1980, 77–102).) Because of its unique status as a document the form and content of the Tarbat inscription deserve a fuller examination than they have so far received. The text, lettering and decoration are important evidence for the cultural contacts of the Pictish church and for the sources of Pictish art. Northumbria and Ireland are the areas to which

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comparisons mainly point. It will be seen, however, that there is no basis for the frequent identifica-
tion of the name on the stone as that of an Irish abbot or for the view that Tarbat was an Irish
monastic foundation and consequently a centre for Irish influence in Pictland.

TARBAT: THE CONTEXT OF THE FIND

Although Tarbat is not documented as an ecclesiastical centre in the early medieval period,
numerous carved stone fragments, some of very high quality, have been found in and around the
churchyard there (Allen 1903, III, 73–75, 88–95). These pieces are attributable to the later years
of the Pictish kingdom. (None belongs to the typologically earlier Class I of Pictish sculpture
(Allen 1903, I, xi).) These fragments and the very unusual occurrence of an inscription in Latin
on a Pictish monument argue for an important monastery at Tarbat or nearby. A small hoard of
silver (Shetelig 1940, 109–10; Graham-Campbell 1976, 115 and passim), which was probably
buried in the second half of the 10th century, has been found in the churchyard. If it was hidden
there for safe-keeping, that suggests that the site was already ecclesiastical by that date. There
are, however, said to be no recognizable Early Christian features on the site and the present
church is of the 18th century (Macdonald & Laing 1970, 138). The outstanding Pictish sculpture
of Nigg, Shandwick and Hilton of Cadboll (Allen 1903, III, figs 59, 66, 72 etc), none of which is
more than a few miles from Tarbat, is further evidence of the importance of this area in the later
Pictish period and is perhaps due to the artistic influence of a monastery at or near Tarbat
(Henderson 1975, 106). Such a monastery, if it existed, can have had no connection with the later
monastery of Nova Ferna in the parish of Tarbat. Nova Ferna was the new site occupied in about
1238 by a community of Premonstratensian canons, who had formerly been at Old Fearn about
ten miles away (Cowan & Easson 1976, 101–2). The similarity of this name with that of the Irish
church of Ferns (Ferna) and E W B Nicholson's misreading of the name on the Tarbat stone
(Allen 1903, III, 94–95) as one similar to that of Reothaide, an 8th-century abbot of Ferns,
suggested to Curle (1940, 103–4) and Henry (1965, 141) that Nova Ferna must be an early daughter
house of the Irish Ferns. The baselessness of this association with Ferns was shown by Henderson
in the Rhind Lectures for 1977 to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (Henderson 1982,
86 n 22). There is consequently no documentary link between Dark Age Tarbat and Ireland.

EARLIER DISCUSSIONS OF THE TARBAT STONE

The stone was first published by Allen (1891). He later published it more fully (Allen 1903,
III, 94–95). He dated its lettering to the 8th or 9th centuries on the basis of comparisons with
examples from Ireland, England and Wales. The reading that he published, which has been
accepted with very minor variations by later writers, is substantially correct except in the last two
lines, where it needs revision. Allen expressed some doubt about Nicholson's Irish abbot, but
nevertheless he published the reading and reconstruction out of which the Irish abbot grew.
Anderson (Allen 1903, I, xxvii) found parallels for the opening formula (*in nomine . . .*) in roughly
contemporary documents and inscriptions in Britain and on the Continent. Kermode (1907, 112)
likened both the lettering and formulae of Tarbat to those of an inscription at Maughold on the
Isle of Man, which had been unknown to Allen and Anderson. Curle (1940, 103–4) saw the
supposed Irish abbot as supporting a connexion with Ireland suggested by similarities with
sculpture at Ahenny and lettering on the Ardagh chalice. Radford (1942, 11) accepted the Irish
abbot but saw the inscription as a retrospective commemoration of the saint who had been
founder or patron of the community. This allowed him to date Tarbat, along with the crosses on

Iona, to the 10th century. Rather uncharacteristically Macalister (1945–49, I, 489–91) rejected the attempts to reconstruct the Tarbat text, and presumably the Irish abbot too, as 'wishful thinking'. Henry (1965, 141) was inclined to accept the Irish abbot and she thought that the fragments with carved spirals found at Tarbat were so similar to the Ahenny crosses as to suggest that the sculptor of the Irish crosses was called to work at the 'new foundation' in Scotland. Brown (1972, 241) cited the Tarbat inscription as evidence of the Picts' familiarity with the Northumbrian tradition of manuscript display script. Robertson (1975, 121) revived the theory of Irish workmanship. Calvert discussed the stone's ornamentation, briefly, in her PhD thesis (1978, 276–77, 307). She too saw similarities with the crosses at Ahenny, but took these similarities as evidence of mutual influences between the Irish and Pictish sculptural traditions at this period and not of the primacy of one over the other. She dated the stone to around the year 800. Henderson (1982, 86 n 22), as has been seen, has finally laid the ghost of the Irish abbot.

THE TARBAT FRAGMENT AND ITS DECORATION

The inscribed stone (pl 26) is a fragment (maximum dimensions approximately 48 × 31 × 20 cm) of a carefully dressed, shaped and carved monument. The inscribed face was narrow. Its original breadth, before the stone was damaged, was a little over the present 20 cm. Above the inscription is a small remnant of the bottom left-hand corner of a sunken panel of interlace ornament. This shows that a large amount of stone is missing from above the inscription. The face to the left of the inscribed face retains part of a curvilinear pattern within a diagonally placed right-angled panel with a raised border. The corner of this border meets a short section of raised border running down the right edge of this face. Most of this border has been cut away and this has led to the loss of the left edge of the inscription. The face to the right of the inscription has lost any decoration it might have had. Damage to this face has caused slight losses on the right edge of the inscription. Something, perhaps as much as several lines, is missing at the bottom of the inscription, where the last line with complete letters is followed by traces of the tops of letters in the following line.

The monument should probably be reconstructed as a broad decorated slab, perhaps, as suggested by Allen (1903, III, 94), a cross-slab. Henry (1965, 141 n 1) thought the stone too thick to have formed part of a slab. The slab from Hilton of Cadboll, however, must have been of at least the same thickness. It is now roughly 18 cm thick (compared with Tarbat's 20+ cm) and it must have been 2 or 3 cm thicker before the decoration of one side was cut back to make way for the 17th-century funerary inscription. Henry suggested instead that the stone was part of a cross, but this seems unlikely, since any symmetrical completion of the pattern on the broader face would give much too broad a face for a cross-shaft. Allen and Anderson placed the monument in their Class III, which Anderson defined as 'Monuments with Celtic ornament in relief, but without the symbols of the other two classes' (Allen 1903, I, xi). It may of course originally have borne Pictish symbols, when complete. If the Tarbat fragment once formed part of a cross-slab with symbols, there would have been a good parallel for it in the Class II cross-slab at St Vigean's with an inscription in Roman letters on one of the narrower sides beneath a panel of interlace (Allen 1903, III, 235–39).

The sculptural decoration of the Tarbat stone is very fragmentary. Some of the other carved fragments found at Tarbat, for example Tarbat No 7 (Allen 1903, III, 91–93; Robertson 1975, pl 14c), which has similar, but less weathered, spiral work, may have come from the same monument, but none can be proved to have done so. On the stone which is the subject of this paper too little of the interlace remains for analysis. The damaged and rather worn, but very fine,

curvilinear pattern is, however, broadly related to what Stevenson has called 'the staid nearly two-dimensional trumpet spirals' of the slab from Hilton of Cadboll, which he compared to spirals in Mercian sculpture at South Kyme in Lincolnshire (Stevenson 1955, 116, 119, pl 9). The similarities between Hilton of Cadboll and Mercian art of around the year 800 have been further explored by Henderson (1967, 154–57, 222). Curle (1940, 103–4) describes the Tarbat ornament as consisting of 'spirals of the Irish chip-carving type (inspired by late metal-work) of the Ahenny cross' and sees this as further evidence of a connection with the south of Ireland. In this view she is followed by Henry (1965, 141), Robertson (1975, 121) and Calvert (1978, 276–77). Whilst it is true that Tarbat shares with Ahenny (County Tipperary) a symmetry of design, a strong sense of a flat frontal plane and the same general technique of carving (Henry 1933, II, pl 19–21), the closest analogies are local. Tarbat resembles the slabs from Shandwick and Hilton of Cadboll with their rectangular panels filled with flat symmetrical designs composed largely of triple spirals (Allen 1903, II, 395; III, figs 59, 70). The Tarbat panel may originally have been a square (set diagonally) and have organized its design around the centre of the square, as does Shandwick and as Hilton of Cadboll seems to have done. All three use angular designs to fill the gap between the right angle of the frame and the diagonally set pairs of spirals in the corners. The design at Tarbat is on a smaller scale than those of Hilton of Cadboll and Shandwick, to judge from the dimensions of the spirals. It shares with Shandwick, but not with Hilton of Cadboll, the trick of hollowing out the thorn-like projections from the lines that link pairs of spirals, although the motif is more complex at Shandwick. These similarities do not help much in dating Tarbat, since neither of the other monuments is dated. Stevenson (1959, 55) may be right in seeing Shandwick as considerably later than Hilton of Cadboll. His dates for these monuments are mid to late 9th century and c 800 respectively. Henderson has identified 9th-century features in the Shandwick slab (1978, 52). It will be suggested below that Tarbat may date from rather earlier than 800.

Tarbat's arrangement of the pattern in a diagonally set panel, probably a square, seems to be without exact parallel in surviving Pictish sculpture, although some of the ornament on the lost part of the cross-slab at nearby Nigg was set in a lozenge (Allen 1903, III, fig 73). There are some examples of frames for ornament in the form of a diagonally set square or a lozenge on Irish crosses and in Insular manuscripts (Henry 1933, II, pl 94.3, 96.6, 99.2 and 3; Alexander 1978, ill 45, 207, 244, 250 etc).

THE INSCRIPTION

The inscription consists of eight substantially intact horizontal lines of lettering and below these one line from which only the tops of the letters survive. There may have been further lines, now totally lost, beneath the fragmentary line. The lettering was not, as would have been usual, incised. It was left in a very low false relief, on the same plane as the undecorated surface of this face of the stone, by cutting away the stone from around the letters. Thin horizontal strips of undecorated surface separate the lines of lettering and, from traces in the upper left-hand corner, it seems that similar strips ran down the sides of the inscription. Shallow grooves separating the letters from the horizontal strips are still visible in several places. Elsewhere they have probably been worn away. The height of the letters varies within the range of about 4 to 4.5 cm. Although the inscription is both worn and damaged, it can still be seen that it was carefully designed and skilfully cut.

The following is a transcription of the letters which are still wholly intact or sufficiently intact to be deducible from what remains on the stone. (The rules of transcription used here are those used by Okasha (1971, 45) and are explained in note 1.)

1   [.]NNO*M*[*I*]
2   [*N*]E*I*HUX[...]
3   [...*U*]XX[*P*...]
4   [...*N*]COM[*M* .]
5   [*M*]OR*A*[. .]
6   [*O*]NE RE*O*[...]
7   [...*I*]LII
8   [...D]I*E*[*HA*...]
9   [...]

Fig 1 sketches clearly extant letters and parts of letters. Fig 2, which completes partially surviving letters where the original form can be reconstructed with reasonable certainty, is
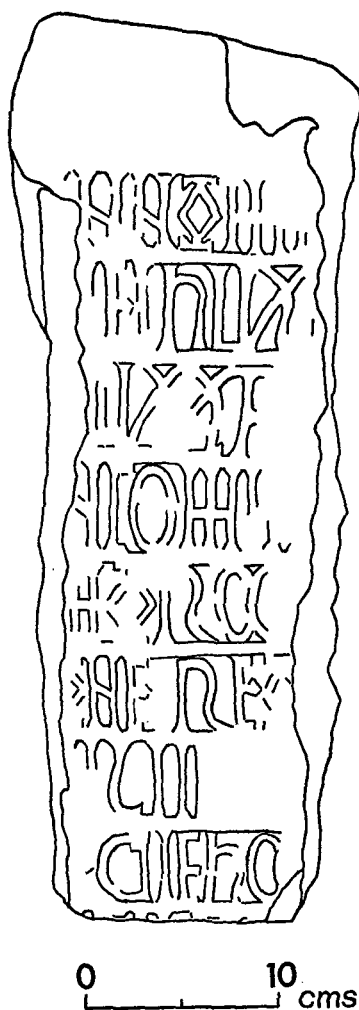

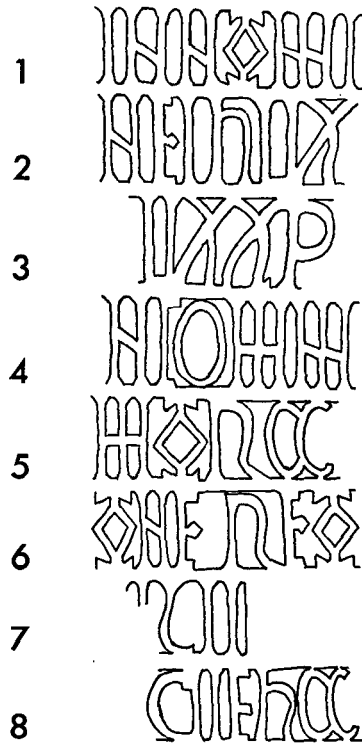FIG 1   Tarbat inscription: sketch of clearly extant letters and parts of letters

FIG 2   Tarbat inscription: suggested reconstruction of damaged letters

intended as an interpretation and an aid to reading. (The edges of many letters are damaged or worn. The outlines shown here are therefore necessarily often approximations.)

NOTES ON READINGS AND TRANSCRIPTION

Because of losses at the beginning and end of lines, it is not always clear how many letters are lost in each case (figs 1 and 2). If the text is correctly reconstructed here, there are four letters missing between lines 2 and 3 (see reconstruction of text below). It is probable that two letters are missing both at the end of line 2 and at the beginning of line 3. The distribution might instead have been one and three or three and one. These letters must in any case have been a little cramped. There is a similar uncertainty over letters missing between lines 3 and 4. The following individual points should also be noted:

Line 1: All that remains of the first letter is a trace of what was probably the upper serif of a vertical, which in this context must be an I. There is insufficient room for an introductory cross between this and what remains of the left edge of the inscription. The M is followed by the ghost of the lower half of a vertical, again, in this context, an I.

Line 2: The upper part of a vertical can be traced at the beginning of the line (from the context, part of an N). There is a much slighter trace of a vertical at the end of the line (P?).

Line 3: The P is fairly certain. The beginnings of strokes branching off to the right can be seen at the top and in the middle of the vertical. The vertical leans slightly to the right.

Line 6: The reading of the R is confirmed by the use of the same form in line 5 in a context which calls for R. A small but probably deliberate gap has been left between the E and the R. There is probably one letter missing after the second O.

Line 7: The letter normally read as T has no true cross-bar. It is much more probably an L derived from the Insular half-uncial script and carved with pronounced serifs. The upper part of a vertical remains before the L. This was probably but not certainly an I. To the left of this at the top of the line is another fragment, which was either part of the same letter as the vertical or part of a letter preceding the vertical, if that is correctly read as an I. This section of text ends in the middle of the line. The latter half of the line remains uncarved.

Line 8: One or perhaps two characters are missing to the left of the 'D'. Immediately to the left of the 'D' there is a trace of a stroke at mid height. This might have been part of an E or, possibly, an introductory cross. The traditional reading . EQIESC . . . (Allen 1903, I, xxvii, III, 94) does violence to surviving characters other than IE. The forms of the other letters will be discussed below.

Line 9: The tops only of letters remain. None can be restored.

There may have been further lines below line 9.

THE TEXT

The text (or texts) can be reconstructed as follows:

(i) [I]N NOM[IN]E IHU X[PI CRU]X X[PI IN]
COM[MEM]ORA[TIO]NE REO[. . .]LII

(ii) [. . .D]IE HA[C . . .]—

Text (i) may be translated: 'In the name of Jesus Christ, the (a?) Cross of Christ in memory of Reo[. . .]lius'. Text (ii) is too fragmentary to be read, but, if the surviving letters read 'die hac', then that may be translated as 'on this day . . .', with a possible loss of text before and a definite one after. Text (i) is a funerary inscription commemorating the individual named. It opens with an invocation of the name of Christ. The 'Cross of Christ' is probably a reference to the monument itself, if, as is likely, it was a normal Pictish cross-slab with a cross carved in relief on one face. If so, this is important evidence that cross-slabs were, at least sometimes, funerary monuments, perhaps but not necessarily associated with burials. (It may be relevant that most of the Tarbat fragments are known to have been found in what was later a grave-yard (see above). This piece was said to have been found in the wall of the manse garden, but it was probably also originally from the grave-yard.) Most Pictish cross-slabs are no longer in their original positions and none has been found in completely certain association with a grave that it was intended to mark (Ritchie & Ritchie 1981, 163–64; Close-Brooks 1980). In spite of this, several Pictish cross-slabs have inscriptions which may plausibly be interpreted as consisting of, or as including, personal names, presumably with some kind of memorial function. The probable and possible names are in Latin letters on the Fordoun and St Vigean's slabs and in oghams on the Aboyne, Brodie, Golspie, Latheron and Scoonie slabs (Allen 1903, I, xxv–vi and III, passim; Jackson 1955, 139–42; Padel 1972, 8, 9, 16, 30–37 and passim). In addition to these Class II monuments, some others which belong to Class III may also have borne names. The Lethnott cross fragment definitely carried a name in Latin lettering and there are possible names in the oghams on the Altyre and Bressay cross-slabs (Allen 1903, I, xxii–iii, xxvii and III, 5–10, 262–63; Padel 1972).

Text (ii) is of uncertain meaning, but, if '*die hac*' is the correct reading, it may have consisted of, or opened with, a dating formula. Alternatively it might conceivably form part of a Pictish text, perhaps a personal name.

THE NAME

What must be the name of the individual commemorated in the funerary inscription is given prominence at the end of text (i) by separating it off from the preceding words by a slight gap. The name seems to have been given a Latin masculine genitive ending and seems also to depend on *in commemoratione*. As the end of line 6 and the beginning of line 7 are imperfect, there is an uncertain number of letters missing from the middle of the name. The number of letters that could be fitted into the gaps would depend both on the position of the right edge of the inscription, which cannot be precisely fixed, and on the breadth of the missing letters. (For example, the IE of line 8 occupies rather less space than the first M of line 4.) It is probable that between one and three letters are completely lost. The fragment of a vertical to the left of the L in line 7 is probably but not certainly an I. Any attempt to reconstruct the name should start with the letters about whose reading there is little doubt: REO and LII. The gap between them must be filled with between one and three letters, which may have been followed by an I.

I have not been able to find a Latin, Pictish, Celtic or Anglo-Saxon name that would provide a plausible reconstruction. Professor William Gillies has suggested, in a private communication, that, if the name is Celtic, it might open with the element *Rigo-* 'king, kingly', with the loss of *-g-*, as in Welsh, in which language, in this position, intervocalic *-g-* was no longer pronounced after the 8th century (Jackson 1953, 393 n 1, 456–57). He points out, however, that even if the name were related to *Rigo-* names, the lowering of *i* to *e* would still have to be explained. Alternatively, he suggests, one might compare the Celtic prefix **ro* 'very, pre-eminent, too' (Welsh *ry*, Cornish and Breton *re*). Given the apparently unusual form of the name and the Pictish context, the name is most likely to be Pictish, but too little is known of that language for it to be possible to know what forms could occur in a Pictish name (Jackson 1955).

THE LANGUAGE AND THE EPIGRAPHIC FORMULAE

The Tarbat inscription is in Latin and only three other objects with Latin inscriptions in Roman letters seem to survive from the Pictish period (the Lethnott cross fragment, the Papa Stronsay stone and the St Ninian's Isle sword-chape (Allen 1903, III, 24–25, 262–63; Small et al 1973, I, 167–73, II, fig 29 and pl XXIX)). Most of the small body of Pictish inscriptions are in oghams and appear to have been composed in the largely impenetrable Pictish language (Padel 1972). They are therefore generally incomprehensible, although, as was seen above, several seem to contain personal names. The great majority of Pictish carved stone monuments are without inscriptions. It is probable that Latin inscriptions were always exceptional and that therefore no specifically Pictish tradition of Latin epigraphy ever developed. The Tarbat inscription was, however, competently drafted by someone who seems to have been well versed in epigraphic practice.

The Latin is correctly written, as far as can be judged from the inscription's fragmentary state. Text (i) is short and verbless. Text (ii) was of an uncertain length, but it was probably never very ambitious. There are no features of language that call for comment. The inscription used two of the standard *nomina sacra* abbreviations, here in the genitive form (IHU and X[PI] for *Iesu* and *Christi*). No trace remains of bars over the letters to mark the abbreviations. The use of

abbreviation bars, which is normal in manuscripts at this date, seems to have been more haphazard in Anglo-Saxon inscriptions (Okasha 1971, 156–57). There are now no traces of punctuation. Words were not separated except for the small gap before the personal name noted above.

The formulae used in the inscription, where they can be paralleled, seem to be characteristic of the British Isles. The inscription seems not to have had an introductory cross, but to have opened with the invocation *in nomine Iesu Christi*. Invocations introduced by *in nomine* are common in Early Christian inscriptions, as can be seen in Diehl's lists of Early Christian Latin inscriptions (1925–31, III, 200–1). He gives no examples of *in nomine Iesu Christi*, but many of similar forms (*in nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi*, *in nomine Christi* etc) and I have yet to find an exact parallel in an inscription listed in any other source. The invocation, as found at Tarbat, is used four times in Acts (2.38, 3.6, 8.12 and 16.18), in contexts where baptisms or miracles are performed in the name of Jesus Christ. It was probably chosen as a general scriptural reminiscence of a potent formula rather than for any specific reference. Acts 2.38 might have been familiar as a lesson read in the mass. It is included in several early lectionaries (Willis 1962, 4, 26, 77, 80, 90). *In nomine* invocations occur frequently in formal documents (Birch 1885, passim) and in various types of inscription including dedicatory inscriptions and most relevantly epitaphs. Such formulae are common on the Continent (Le Blant 1856–65, nos 29A, 49, 162, 322, 375, 377, 391, 412A, 463, 621B; 1892, 80, 126, 247, 253, 254A, 281, 292) and are also found in Britain.

An approximately contemporary example accepted as Pictish in origin is the Latin inscription on the 8th-century 'sword-chape' from the St Ninian's Isle hoard. There the *in nomine d s* (for *in nomine dei summi* or *in nomine dei*) is used along with another inscription which probably records the name of the owner (Brown 1959; Small et al 1973, I, 167–73). Again of about the same date is a small stone disc of a little over 4 cm in diameter and probably Scottish, rather than Pictish, in origin, which was found in the fort at Dunadd. It was distinguished and perhaps consecrated for its uncertain function by the inscription *inomine*, presumably for *in nomine* (Christison & Anderson 1905, 311 and fig 32).

The *in nomine* formula was also used elsewhere in Britain. There are several examples among the Early Christian inscriptions of Wales (Nash-Williams 1950, 41 and n, 140, 144 and n, 154, 155 and 160). Some of these and one on the Isle of Man will be discussed below. The only certain use of the formula in an Anglo-Saxon inscription is the *nomine domini* on the 10th-century coin-brooch from Canterbury, where it is intended perhaps, like the St Ninian's Isle inscription, to protect the owner (Hinton 1974, 13–15). It is possible also to read part of the inscription on the Bossington ring as a garbled version of *in Christi nomine* (*in xp̄o nomen* . . .) (Hinton 1974, 9–12). There are no examples of the formula in the Irish inscriptions listed by Macalister (1945–49).

The formula *crux Christi* occurs in Paul's Epistles (1 Corinth 1.17; Galat 6.12 and Philipp 3.18), where the phrase is used as a symbol of faith in Christ. Nash-Williams (1950, 163) appears to state that the epigraphic use of the formula is 'Irish, possibly with Merovingian or even earlier (? N. African) antecedents', but this passage seems to be based on an uncharacteristic confusion of sources. The reference that he gives for the Irish examples seems to be erroneous. There are also no examples of the formula in Petrie's (1872–78) and Macalister's (1945–49) collections of Irish inscriptions, although there are examples of *crux* on its own or with a personal name ('the cross of X') in Ireland, Man and Cornwall (Macalister 1945–49, nos 559, 560?, 561?, 587, 1050, 1051 and 1066). It appears from another part of Nash-Williams work (1950, 25) that the parallel that he originally intended to draw was with Irish stones that carry the word *crux* and not simply the symbol of the cross. The number Irish examples is to too small to justify his implied claim that the formula of *crux* followed by a name is Irish in origin. (The latter formula may in fact have been known in Pictland, for it probably lies behind the linguistically mixed ogham inscription

on the carved slab of probably 10th-century date from Bressay in Shetland (Allen 1903, III, 5–10; Jackson 1955, 140–42; Padel 1972, 34–36, 62–67). The inscription seems to open with a word for 'cross', which may be followed by a personal name.) To return to Wales and the formula used at Tarbat, Nash-Williams (1950, 137, 146, 148, 162–63) gives four examples of the *crux Christi* formula on monuments, the earliest of which he dates '7th–9th century' and the latest '10th–11th century'. The early Welsh example at Margam and a slab at Maughold in the Isle of Man, which has the formula in the form *crucis Christi imaginem* are discussed below, because they also carry the *in nomine* formula. The references to possible Merovingian and remoter origins given by Nash-Williams (1950, 163) seem again to be erroneous or irrelevant, if the *crux Christi* formula is meant. I can in fact find no examples in Continental inscriptions.

The formula *in commemoratione* with the genitive of the personal name is not found in Diehl's lists, but there is one *pro commemoratione* apparently with the genitive and one *in commemoratione* followed by a name in the nominative (Diehl 1925–31, nos 1575–76 and indices). The equivalent formula in Wales was *pro anima* with the genitive (Nash-Williams 1950, refs in index).

The formula *die hac*, if that is what it is, may have been introduced by a preposition. It may have been the opening of some kind of dating formula, in which case it could have been the equivalent of the phrase *sub die* used to introduce the date in early Spanish inscriptions (Vives 1942, refs on p 245).

The basic structure of the Tarbat inscription, which combines an invocation of the name of God with a reference to a representation of the Cross that had been made to commemorate an individual in anticipation of, or after, death, can best be compared to the inscriptions on three crosses in South Wales, dated by Nash-Williams (1950, 41, 140, 144, 148) between the late 9th and the 11th centuries, and one on a slab at Maughold on the Isle of Man, which probably dates from the 8th century (Kermode 1907, 74, 111–12; Megaw 1950, 170 and pl opp 177; Cubbon 1977, 7). The precise formulae used vary. The Welsh examples record that A made or had made (some form of *praeparare*) the cross (*crux*) for the soul of B. Maughold's text is more loosely constructed. The Welsh examples use *pro anima* rather than *in commemoratione* to introduce the name. At Maughold a bishop seems to be named but the published illustrations and readings indicate that the text is damaged and partly illegible at this point. The monuments at Margam and Maughold are closest to Tarbat in that they use a form of the *crux Christi* formula. (In the following discussion of formulae I have regularized the orthography of the Latin and resolved the abbreviations.)

Margam's text is as follows:

In nomine dei summi.   Crux Christi.   Praeparavit   Grutne pro anima Ahest.

which Nash-Williams (1950, 41) translates as: 'In the Name of God Most High. The Cross of Christ. Grutne prepared it for the soul of Ahest.'

Maughold distributes it's inscriptions over three separate areas of the stone and it is not necessarily to be read continuously. Text (*i*), which is inscribed around a marigold pattern at the top of the stone, probably names the deceased. (I have not examined this inscription. Kermode (1907, 74, 111; cf Macalister 1945–49, no 1067) gives two differing readings. '. . . EPPS DEI INSVL . . .' seems fairly certain for part of the text.) Texts *ii* and *iii* are inscribed along the sides of two incised 'monogrammatic crosses', which are below the marigold pattern. Text *ii* may perhaps read either

in Iesu Christi nomine

or

feci in Christi nomine

('In the name of Jesus Christ' or 'I made in the name of Christ'.). Text *iii* reads *more certainly:*

crucis Christi imaginem

('the image of the cross of Christ'). The *imaginem* is in the accusative and so may depend on the *feci* which Kermode read in text *ii*, but this reading is not at all certain, to judge from published illustrations. Tarbat, Margam and Maughold appear to represent a shared tradition. The formula with its reference to the funerary use of a representation of the cross of Christ is likely to be Insular in origin, given the remarkable development in Britain and Ireland of free-standing crosses and cross-bearing monuments. The source of the formula might be expected to be in an area that was in a position to influence practice in Pictland, Wales and Man. Ireland and Northumbria are the most probable areas, although neither Irish nor Northumbrian examples now remain.

THE LETTERING

The style of the decorative lettering and the individual letter forms belong in a more obvious way to the Insular tradition. The lettering is clearly related to the 'decorative capitals' used in the display script of Insular manuscripts like the Lindisfarne Gospels (Kendrick *et al* 1956–60, II, 75–77, 93–94, 99; Duft & Meyer 1953, 131–35; Verey *et al* 1980, 48 and passim). The Tarbat alphabet is like those used in the manuscripts in its combination of forms from a variety of sources: Roman capitals, angular variants of Roman capitals, Insular half-uncial (Lowe's 'majuscule' (1972, xv–xvi)) forms, adapted from manuscript text scripts, and decorative elaborations of, and variations on, letters from these sources. Tarbat is particularly close to some of the manuscripts in the way in which the densely packed lettering forms an all-over pattern. The letters occupy about as much of the space between the prominent borders as is possible. They are closely packed and rather elongated. The individual strokes are broad, almost as broad as the raised borders, and the breadth of the strokes seems to have been kept uniform. As the letters take up the full height of the line the numerous verticals along with the horizontal borders impose an almost grid-like unity on the lettering, which, however, is counteracted by the irregularly distributed curves, diagonals and horizontals. The grid is further softened by finishing off verticals and the horizontal bars of the angular O's with serifs, that seem to vary between the angularity of a wedge and a trumpet-like flaring out of the end of the stroke. In a similar way the central horizontal of some of the E's is given the form of a lozenge.

The character of the lettering can be defined more closely through an analysis of individual letter forms (pl 1 and 2 and figs 1 and 2). Uncertainties in reading or reconstruction (fig 2) are mentioned in the discussions of individual letters. Fourteen letters of the alphabet seem to survive on the stone. (The parallels cited in the discussions of individual letter forms can be assumed to be drawn from the sources listed in note 2, when a specific reference is not given. References are given below to examples of all parallels with lettering in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells.)

A

This letter seems to occur twice (in lines 5 and 8). The reading in line 5 is verified by the context. The exact reconstruction of the right-hand side of the letter is uncertain, but it was something like the letters shown in fig 2. The type of A is that used in Insular half uncial. It is the characteristic form described by Lowe (1972, xv) as being 'shaped like conjoined *oc*'. It seems to be a narrower version of the letter to be seen in the display script of the Lindisfarne Gospels (fol 29 cf Kells, fol 13). Related forms can be found in half-uncial inscriptions in Scotland (Okasha 1971,

pl 3; Small *et al* 1973, II, fig 29), Northern England, Ireland, Wales and Man (Cubbon 1977, 9). The Ardagh chalice, whose decorative capitals are more elaborate than Tarbat's, uses angular derivatives of this form.

C

The C in line 4 is a very narrow version of the rectangular form of capital C. The form was very common in capital inscriptions on the Continent and in Britain from the Dark Ages to the Romanesque period. It occurs in the display script of Insular manuscripts, for example in the Lindisfarne Gospels (fol 3 cf Kells, fol 16v). It also occurs on the Ardagh chalice.

D(?)

D is the most probable reading of the first letter in line 8. I know of no other example of this exact form. (It is perhpas somewhat damaged.) It is probably to be explained as a decorative capital variation on the theme of half-uncial D. The form could be arrived at by closing the bow, which is usually left open, exaggerating the slight serif at the top end of the bow, shortening the vertical and simplifying the bow into a semicircle. A possibly transitional form, in which a square serif can be seen forming in a closed bow, can be seen in the inscription in the portrait of David on fol 172v of the Durham Cassiodorus (Alexander 1978, ill 75). The Ardagh chalice's derivative of half-uncial D is an angular letter with little resemblance to the Tarbat letter. The resemblance of the Tarbat letter to the reversed capital D that is found from time to time in Early Christian inscriptions is probably accidental.

E

Tarbat uses a narrow form of Roman capital E in lines 2, 6 and 8. This form in various breadths is very common in Early Christian and Dark Age inscriptions in capitals and occurs in Insular display script. The central horizontal in lines 2 and 6 of the inscription seems fairly clearly to have been lozenge-shaped, a feature which also occurs in the Lindisfarne Gospels (fol 3 cf Kells, fol 124).

H

The letter in line 2, which is there used for Greek *eta* in the *nomen sacrum* (*ihu* for *Iesu*), is the form found in Insular half uncial. It is also found in Insular display scripts, for example in the Lindisfarne Gospels (fol 27) and the Book of Kells (fol 19v), and in Insular inscriptions, both in capitals and half uncial. On the Tarbat stone the bow joins the vertical unusually high up. The fourth extant letter in line 8 was probably also an H. The damaged right leg appears to have curved inwards a little in a manner perhaps influenced by the uncial letter (cf Lindisfarne Gospels, fol 95, line 6; Book of Kells, fol 299v). Both varieties of H (with straight and with curved right leg) were used in 8th-century inscriptions in Northumbria, for example at Jarrow (Higgitt 1979, 361–62, pl LXIVb and LXVb).

I

The letter which is found complete in lines 2, 7 and 8 is the plain and normal capital form and requires no further comment. It is the only form used in the Lindisfarne display script (cf Kells, fol 8 etc).

L(?)

L is almost certainly the correct reading of the first whole letter remaining in line 7. It would

seem to be the L of Insular half uncial, which is also used in the Lindisfarne display script (fol 5v cf Kells initial, fol 310). It is a rounded letter with the curve bowing out slightly to the left towards the base. It can be found in some inscriptions on stone in Britain and Ireland in which the script is derived from half uncial (eg Macalister 1945–49, no 908; Lionard 1961, fig 8.8 and passim; Okasha 1971, pl 145), but the only example which I have found in an inscription where the script is predominantly capital is an angular version of the letter on a stone fragment from Lethnott (Allen 1903, III, fig 272B).

M

M occurs once in line 1, twice in line 4 and once in line 5. The letter seems to be used in two slightly varying forms. The first M in line 4 is in the simpler form with three verticals crossed by a horizontal. That in line 5 was probably the same. This form can be seen in the Lindisfarne Gospels (fol 3), on the Ardagh chalice and, on stone, in Northumbria, in Wales and possibly on Man (Kermode 1907, figs 14, 43 and pl X; Macalister 1945–49, pl LXIV). The Book of Kells uses a derivative of this form with two horizontals (fol 114v). The M in line 1 and the second M in line 4 are damaged, they appear to have had cross-bars broken into two slightly separate sections, each of which inclines gently down to the right (fig 2). This second form occurs, along with several half-uncial letter-forms in an inscription at Llangadwaladr in Anglesey, which probably dates from about 625 (Hughes 1924, 49–53, fig 78; Nash-Williams 1950, 55–57, fig 21; Jackson 1953, 160–61). The form with broken inclined cross-bar is also found on a slab at Toureen Peakaun in Ireland (Lionard 1961, fig 3.2). There, however, the slope is down to the left rather than to the right.

N

Enough remains of the N's in lines 1, 4 and 6 to see that they were in a form commonly met with in inscriptions between the Early Christian period and the 12th century. In this form the diagonal meets the verticals well short of their ends. Again the form can be matched in the Lindisfarne Gospels (fol 27), in the Book of Kells (fol 114v) and on the Ardagh chalice, and it is common in Dark Age inscriptions on stone in Britain and on the Continent.

O

O appears in two forms. In line 4 it is in the normal rounded capital form (Lindisfarne, fol 139; Kells, fol 309 (initial)), although here it is rather elongated. In lines 1 and 5 O is lozenge-shaped with a horizontal bar at top and bottom. The letter in line 5 is broader than that in line 1. The damaged letters at the beginning and end of line 6 were also almost certainly of this form. This angular decorative capital from can once again be found in the Lindisfarne Gospels display script (fol 3 cf initial in Kells, fol 45) and on the Ardagh chalice. It also seems to have been used on stone on a lost inscription of the 8th century from Hartlepool (Okasha 1971, pl 44) and on a very weathered and largely illegible inscription in capitals at Toureen Peakaun (Macalister, 1945–49, no 924B; Duignan 1944, 226–27).

P(?)

The last partially extant letter in line 3 is presumably P, intended to be read as Greek *rho* in the *nomen sacrum* (xpi for *Christi*). Traces of strokes branching off the vertical to the right, half way up and at the top, seem to indicate that the bow of the P was closed. Both open and closed forms of P are known in inscriptions of around the 8th century in Northumbria, Wales and Ireland. The letter is too damaged to show whether there was a loop beneath the bow, as there is in the Lindisfarne Gospels (fol 27) and in the Book of Kells (fol 8).

R

R occurs in lines 5 and 6. It is in the open half-uncial form, one of the two forms used in Insular half-uncial script, the other being the Roman capital form derived from uncial. Only the latter form is used in the display script of the Lindisfarne Gospels, but variants of the half-uncial letter are found in the display scripts of some other Insular books, for example the Lichfield Gospels and St Gall Cod 51 (Alexander 1978, ill 76 and 201), on the Ardagh chalice and in some Insular inscriptions on stone. This half-uncial form with its nearly straight and vertical right-hand stroke ending in a short foot should be distinguished from the open variety of the capital, which can be seen, for example, on the Ruthwell Cross (Okasha 1968, 327). The Tarbat letter should be compared with letters like the R's on the Northumbrian inscribed stone from Billingham, which is probably of the 8th century (Morris 1974, pl III.2).

U

The letter in line 3 is a rectangular variation on the letter used in Insular half uncial. It is common in manuscript display script (Lindisfarne, fol 3; Kells, fol 15v). It was used on the Ardagh chalice and, on stone, in Wales and perhaps on one of the Lindisfarne 'pillow stones', although the letter in question is rather worn (Okasha 1971, pl 80).

X

The letter occurs in lines 2 and 3. The two X's in line 3 are damaged and their reconstruction is not entirely certain. The X in line 2 and the second X in line 3 are used for Greek *chi* in the *nomen sacrum* (*xpi* for *Christi*). The letter is not the simple capital form of the Lindisfarne Gospels display script, but a less symmetrical letter apparently loosely based on the Insular half-uncial text letter. The roughly vertical right legs may have been pushed to the left to give a narrower letter for this condensed lettering. Most of the strokes seem to be curved, a feature found in the display script and initials of some books, where, however, the letters are broader than these ones (eg Alexander 1978, ill 51, 152, 175). There is a serif or small foot remaining on the right leg of the second X in line 3.

As the analysis of individual letters has shown, the Tarbat alphabet can best be compared with the decorative capitals used in the display script of Insular manuscripts of about the 8th century. I have noted examples of all the parallels provided by the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells, the display scripts of which are more like the Tarbat alphabet than that of any other manuscript. There seem to be seventeen letter forms on the Tarbat stone (fourteen letters with H, M and O in two different forms). The Lindisfarne Gospels (datable to between c 698 and 721) can match twelve of these quite closely. The forms of the Lindisfarne decorative capitals are at the same stage of evolution as those on the Tarbat stone. Tarbat and Lindisfarne are clearly more advanced than the Book of Durrow, of about the third quarter of the 7th century, the display script of which lacks both the decorative forms and the precision found in Lindisfarne (Luce *et al* 1960). The Lindisfarne lettering stands at, or very near to, the beginning of the fully developed tradition of Insular decorative capitals. The more fluid decorative capitals of the Durham Gospel fragment (Ms A.II.17), which was probably written and decorated at Lindisfarne at about the same time as the Lindisfarne Gospels, have much less in common with Tarbat, in either general appearance or individual forms (Verey *et al* 1980, 48 and passim).

The Book of Kells, which dates from some time between the mid 8th and the early 9th century, uses all the letter forms which Tarbat shares with Lindisfarne (with the exception of the M, for which a derivative of the form is used instead) either in its display script or amongst its minor initials. (Examples are again noted above.) The Kells alphabet is, however, unlikely to be

the source of Tarbat's. Kells has a greater tendency towards the decorative elaboration of forms than either Lindisfarne or Tarbat. Kells and Tarbat are more likely to be more or less contemporary descendants of the tradition of lettering that perhaps originated in the Lindisfarne Gospels. The Kells display script varies considerably. The decorative complexity of pages like fols 183 and 203 is very different from the Tarbat inscription, which has, however, much in common with the grid-like treatment of some of the simpler passages of lettering in the book (eg fol 114V).

The general impression made by the Tarbat lettering is closer still to the display script on initial pages of the Irish Gospel book at St Gall (Cod 51 (Duft & Meyer 1953, 131–35, pl II, IV, VI and VIII)). This similarity does not apply to individual letter forms, which provide fewer analogies than do those of Lindisfarne and Kells, but rather to the style and proportions of the lettering. The St Gall lettering and Tarbat have much in common. Letters in both are thick-stemmed and narrow. Verticals end in trumpet-like flaring serifs at top and bottom. Little space is left between strokes or letters. The lettering is laterally compressed and is fitted into tight bands, in which the tops and bottoms of letters follow exactly the ruled horizontals that define the bands. Meyer (Duft & Meyer 1953, 132) has called the result of this a 'Schriftband' (a band of writing) in order to bring out the decorative effect, in which individual letters loose their independence in the all-over pattern. It is accepted that the St Gall manuscript is later than the Lindisfarne Gospels. There is no agreement on the relative dating of St Gall Cod 51 and the Book of Kells (Lowe 1956, no 901; 1972, no 274; Koehler 1972, 188 etc; Brown 1972, 245–46; Alexander 1978, 66–67). The figure style of the St Gall Gospels has some points of similarity with a datable Irish manuscript of c 807, the Book of Armagh, but resemblances to the Lichfield Gospels, for example in facial types, suggest that the St Gall manuscript was made rather earlier, perhaps in the later 8th century (Alexander 1978, nos 21 and 53).

The raised bands that frame the lines of lettering at Tarbat were probably derived from the frames used in some manuscripts to enclose panels of decorative lettering. Double lines of dots are already used to frame display script in the Lindisfarne Gospels and bar-like frames occur in several later manuscripts, although they are not used in St Gall Cod 51 (Alexander 1978, ill 50, 60, 109, 140, 152, 171, 252, 261 etc).

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the Tarbat lettering is very unlikely to be earlier than the Lindisfarne Gospels of around the year 700. There is no palaeographical reason why the forms of the Tarbat capitals, which are well designed, relatively simple and quite similar to those in the Lindisfarne Gospels, should have to date from very much later than the manuscript. The style of the lettering, on the other hand, suggests a date closer to that of the Book of Kells and St Gall Cod 51, perhaps in the second half of the 8th century. The palaeographical similarities between Tarbat and Lindisfarne can, however, be taken as good evidence that Tarbat's lettering is Northumbrian in origin.

DECORATIVE CAPITALS IN INSCRIPTIONS

Insular decorative capitals seem to have been developed in the first place in manuscripts rather than in an epigraphic context, although the difficulties of carving on stone or wood may have influenced some of the angular letter forms (Kendrick et al 1956–60, II, 75, 93). Decorative capitals were, however, soon used in some centres for inscriptions on metal (the Ardagh chalice) and on stone. There are several examples on stone in Northumbria, for example at Ruthwell, Hartlepool, Lindisfarne and Carlisle (Okasha 1971), apparently only one in Wales, from Ramsey Island (Okasha 1970), two in Ireland, at Toureen Peakaun (Macalister, 1945–49, no 924B; Lionard 1961, fig 3.2) and two in Scotland, at Tarbat and Lethnott (see below). The damaged and

carelessly executed inscription in capitals at Maughold on the Isle of Man is probably not directly connected with this group (Kermode 1907, figs 14, 43, pl X; Macalister 1945–49, p LXIV). That the majority of examples are in Northumbria fits well with the hypothesis that decorative capitals originated in Northumbrian manuscripts. In Wales, Ireland and Scotland inscriptions in decorative capitals were exceptional, non-capital scripts normally being used. In Northumbria they seem mainly to date to around the 8th century. Non-capital scripts are also found (eg Okasha 1971, nos 9, 30 and 39). As was shown above, Northumbrian inscriptions on stone in decorative capitals can parallel most but not all of the forms on the Tarbat stone. None now surviving provides a close comparison for the alphabet as a whole. The Ardagh chalice, which, although found in Ireland, is closely related to Northumbrian art, as seen in the Lindisfarne Gospels, and for which a Northumbrian origin has even been suggested (Kendrick *et al*, 1956–60, II, 251–52), has an inscription in lettering similar to Lindisfarne and Tarbat. The Ardagh inscription is something like Tarbat in its narrow proportions, lateral compression and strong sense of frequently repeated verticals. Its lettering is, however, more complex and more angular than either Lindisfarne or Tarbat.

The Tarbat lettering is not closely related to that of any of the other six inscriptions in Roman lettering from Pictish contexts. Five are on stone and, unlike Tarbat, are incised and not in relief. The other is on metal.

The only inscription other than Tarbat in decorative capitals is that on a fragment of a cross from Lethnott in Angus (Allen 1903, III, fig 272). The marked use of wedge serifs is a typical Insular feature and the letters are Insular in character, but its alphabet is not very similar to that of Tarbat. The angular treatments of Insular half-uncial L and of uncial D are in the spirit of the lettering of the Ardagh chalice, although they do not occur there. The most unusual letters are the capital E and square capital C, in which the verticals continue beyond the junctions with the horizontals at top and bottom. The forms are characteristic of Frankish inscriptions (Deschamps 1929, 11, 65–80 passim, pl I). Their use, perhaps under Frankish influence, in the display scripts of three books attributable, with varying degrees of certainty, to Northumbria is another possible piece of evidence for Northumbrian influence in Pictland (Alexander 1978, ill 49, 60 and 68). (This Frankish feature can also be seen in the P's of the Maughold inscription (Kermode 1907, fig 43), perhaps independently of the other British examples.) The Lethnott lettering is, like that of Tarbat, later than the Lindisfarne Gospels and most probably dates from the 8th century. It also shows that Tarbat was not the only centre in Pictland to use decorative capitals derived from Insular manuscript display scripts.

The other Pictish inscriptions in Roman lettering are, with the exception of the Newton stone, whose script and meaning are obscure, in non-capital Insular book-scripts and so will not be considered in detail (Allen 1903, III, figs 21, 214, 217, 250–51, 272; Small *et al* 1973, II, fig 29). Brown (1972, 241) has argued from these inscriptions and that at Tarbat that the Picts knew 'the same range of insular scripts as we find in England'. The scripts of these inscriptions help us to visualize the lost manuscripts of the Pictish church as being similar to those from Ireland and England.

INSCRIPTIONS IN RAISED LETTERING

Much of the effect of the Tarbat inscription is gained by its unusual use of raised lettering. It is a very suitable technique for lettering on Class II or III Pictish sculpture, as it helps to assimilate the inscription, by the use of relief rather than incision, to the surrounding areas of decoration carved in relief. The raised lettering at Tarbat constitutes a clearly defined piece of all-over pattern, the raised strips between the lines and the compression of the lettering being a

response to the '*horror vacui*' typical of much of Insular art. A closely comparable approach to lettering as panels of pattern has been observed above in the display script of the St Gall Gospels.

In spite of the apparent suitability of relief lettering for monuments carved with ornament in relief in 8th- and 9th-century Britain and Ireland, it is in fact very rare. Much of the sculpture is without inscription and that which is inscribed normally has incised lettering. The Tarbat lettering is not, however, quite unique in this period. The roughly contemporary Irish cross from Bealin, which may have been made for an abbot of Clonmacnois who died in 810 or 811, has in the lowest panel on one of the two broader faces, a very weathered inscription in raised letters (Henry 1930; 1965, 143–44). The text is in the vernacular and asks for a prayer for the man who had the cross made. The inscription is set within a raised border. It differs from Tarbat in not having the rigid grid of raised horizontal lines between the lines of lettering. The script is half uncial and not, as at Tarbat, decorated capitals. No ambitious sculpture with relief lettering survives from this period in Northumbria, but the technique was known. Two grave slabs, probably of the 8th century, at Wensley commemorate the names of the deceased in raised decorative capitals (Okasha 1971, pl 120, 121). Bealin, Wensley and Tarbat are unlikely to have been the only examples of raised lettering in early Insular sculpture. It is not clear whether one of these regions (Ireland, Northumbria or Pictland) was the source from which the other two regions adopted this technique of letter cutting.

The use by Insular sculptors of raised lettering could have been suggested by works in various media. It was used on ivories, for example on the Northumbrian 'Franks Casket' of around the year 700 (Okasha 1971, pl 6) or on Byzantine ivories like the 6th-century plaque in the British Museum with a figure of St Michael (Beckwith 1979, ill 68). It is the natural technique for lettering in *repoussé* metalwork. Roughly contemporary examples are the probably English Mortain casket, the portable altar of St Cuthbert in Durham and the reliquary of Bishop Altheus in Sion in Switzerland (Okasha 1971, pl 35 and 93; Hubert *et al* 1969, pl 315). Coin inscriptions are, again for technical reasons, in relief.

Although it could be argued that the sculptors of raised inscriptions were originally imitating metalwork, which has been seen as inspiring several features in Insular sculpture (Henry 1965, 140), the technique was also sometimes used outside Britain, in sculpture in stone and wood and in architectural decoration. The great majority of monumental inscriptions in the Greek and Latin worlds were incised, but not all were. Inscriptions in relief on stone were frequently used on funerary monuments in western Greece in the Hellenistic period (Fraser & Rönne 1957, 155–58), but otherwise they were apparently very rare before the Late Antique period. Lettering in relief, produced by fixing separate letters of bronze to the masonry, was, however, commonly used on buildings and monuments under the Roman emperors (Nordenfalk 1970, 25–26). Relief inscriptions in stone seem to have enjoyed a limited revival in the Greek East in the early Byzantine period. The technique achieved the distinction of being used prominently and stylishly in the architectural decoration of two, or perhaps three, important 6th-century churches in Constantinople, St Polyeuktos, SS Sergius and Bacchus and the unknown origin of a recently found inscribed architectural fragment (Mathews 1976, 225, pl 26–7, 26–8, 29–21, 29–25, 29–28, 29–30; Mango & Ševčenko 1978, no 24). Relief inscriptions were probably never common because of the laborious technique, which involved cutting away the background around the letters, and I have so far found only a handful of other Greek examples of about this time. When the technique appears in the West, in Spain and Rome, it may well be due to Byzantine influence. In Spain three important pieces of sculpture of arguably Visigothic date bear inscriptions in raised lettering. The dating of the inscribed sculpture at Quintanilla and on the re-used chancel screen at Santa Cristina de Lena is controversial. Dates proposed range from the 7th to the 10th century (Vives

1942, 170–71; *Ars Hispaniae* II, fig 229, 322; Puig i Cadafalch 1961, 116, 134–35; Werckmeister 1964, 168, 171). The more classical decoration and lettering of the undated sarcophagus of Ithacius at Oviedo is most unlikely to occur later than the 9th century and probably dates from before the Islamic conquest (Vives 1942, 92; *Ars Hispaniae* II, fig 241; Ulbert 1971, 26). It is probably more important for the present case that in Rome the Greek pope, John VII (705–7), whose patronage brought a strong Byzantine influence to painting in Rome, had inscriptions both in Greek and Latin carved for him in relief lettering (Silvagni 1943, tab XII. 4–6; Gray 1948, 47–49; Kraut-heimer 1980, 100–04). It is not impossible that the idea was brought directly from Rome to North-umbria, given what is already known about artistic contacts between the two areas in the later 7th and 8th centuries. There is reason to believe that an English traveller brought back copies of the texts of papal epitaphs shortly after the death of John VII (Lapidge 1975, 801). Such a collector of inscriptions would have been likely to notice a striking innovation in epigraphic technique. If the relief inscription came from Rome to Northumbria, it would have done so at about this time, since, according to Gray (1948, 46), the only examples of the technique to survive in Rome from this period are those made for John. An alternative possibility is that relief lettering was introduced by the masons from Gaul who are known to have been at work in Northumbria in the later 7th century (Plummer 1896, I, 368, 390). The idea could then have come to Pictland from the Greek East via Western Europe and Northumbria. The technique could, of course, have been evolved independently in the British Isles, but there is nothing implausible about a Continental, especially a Roman source at this date.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally the various types of evidence revealed by a close examination of the Tarbat stone can be assembled to assess the place of the monument in Insular art and to see what light it throws on those for whom it was made.

The inscription cannot be used to provide a close dating. The reading of the personal name is uncertain, but it is likely to have been Pictish. The traditional identification of the name as that of an 8th-century Irish abbot of Ferns is not compatible with the extant letters on the stone. The best comparison for the alphabet used is with the relatively restrained decorative capitals found in the Lindisfarne Gospels of around the year 700. The Tarbat lettering was apparently designed in a centre that produced manuscripts influenced in script and decoration by the school of Lindisfarne. The interval that elapsed between the evolution of this brand of capital and its use at Tarbat need not have been a long one. A date in the second half of the 8th century would allow time for the evolution of Tarbat's more compact and grid-like treatment of lettering, which is reminiscent of the Book of Kells and, more particularly, the St Gall Gospels.

The spiral ornament, which is the only extant decoration on the stone other than a trace of interlace, does not help much in refining the date. It is close to that on monuments in the immediate vicinity like those of Shandwick and Hilton of Cadboll and this group has a relative in Mercia at South Kyme. The slab from Hilton of Cadboll is normally thought to date from around 800, and it is one of several Pictish stones showing features that are shared with Mercian sculpture attributed to the later 8th or early 9th centuries. A slightly earlier date in the later 8th century, which would not strain the relationship with Mercia and might suit Tarbat's lettering a little better, should be considered for Hilton of Cadboll and Tarbat. This does not prevent some of the related sculpture in Easter Ross, for example the Shandwick slab, from being dated somewhat later. There are also clear similarities between the spirals on the Tarbat fragments and those on the Ahenny crosses in southern Ireland. The Ahenny sculpture is not, however, closely datable, although Henry (1965,

141) has dated it to the mid 8th century and Stevenson (1956, 91–92) to the early 9th. It does not therefore help in clarifying the dating of Tarbat.

The theory of a documented Irish connection in Tarbat has not stood up to close examination. The Irish abbot and the Irish foundation at Nova Ferna are both chimeras. Furthermore the wording of the inscription has no close parallels in surviving Irish inscriptions. The best comparisons are instead Welsh and Manx. The distribution of surviving comparable inscriptions may of course be misleading. There are agreed to be artistic links between Ireland and Pictland in the decades around 800, which the spirals of Tarbat exemplify. Two further parallels point ambiguously to Ireland. The decorative capitals of Tarbat are of the same general type as those on the probably Irish Ardagh chalice, which has, however, strong artistic and palaeographical links with Northumbrian art of the period of the Lindisfarne Gospels. Raised letters occur on the Irish cross at Bealin, but the lettering is quite different from Tarbat's.

To sum up, the lettering seems to have come from Northumbria. The wording and structure of the principal formula are of an Insular type, but the region of origin is uncertain. The raised lettering and spiral ornament have parallels in both Ireland and England. The direction, in which the artistic influences that explain the similarities between the art of Pictland, Iona and Ireland around the year 800 moved, remains an open question. There seem to be no important points of similarity between the Tarbat stone and Irish art that could not be explained by the use of common sources or Pictish influence in Ireland, whereas the letter forms point quite distinctly to Northumbrian influence. Brown (1972, 235–43) has summarized the evidence for contacts between Northumbria and Pictland and also for Northumbrian influences on Pictish art during the 8th century. This phase of contacts opens at the highest level, when Nechton, king of the Picts, asks the abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow for ecclesiastical advice and, in addition, for masons to come to Pictland to build a stone church. Towards the end of the century two Northumbrian rulers fled from Northumbria to Pictland. One of the two, Osbald, apparently came, in 796, in the company of a group of monks from Lindisfarne (Brown 1972, 238, 240). An East Coast Pictish monument with an inscription in Northumbrian lettering fits well into this context.

What light does the Tarbat stone throw on Pictland? It was formerly part of a funerary monument of high quality, perhaps a cross-slab, intended to commemorate an individual whose name is probably Pictish. The inscription is in Latin and shows knowledge of epigraphic formulae used elsewhere in the British Isles. It is written in well designed lettering of a type developed in Northumbrian manuscripts. These features argue that at Tarbat or somewhere very close by there was an ecclesiastical centre with contacts that went beyond Pictland. This centre was capable of producing books with display script in Insular decorative capitals. It would also seem, to judge from the sculpture of Ross-shire, to have had some kind of artistic contacts with both Mercia and Ireland. Whether or not the Book of Kells was written in a centre in the East of Scotland, the Tarbat inscription furnishes very strong evidence for the existence of at least one ecclesiastical centre in Pictland with educated personnel with the knowledge to enable them to write and decorate fine manuscripts in the Insular tradition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1   The following conventions are used in the transcription of the text. Roman capitals indicate extant and legible letters. Italics indicate damaged but legible letters. Italics in brackets indicate damaged letters, the reading of which is less than certain. Roman capitals in brackets indicate unusual letter forms of less than certain reading. [. . .] shows the loss of an indefinite number of letters. [.] and [. .] show the loss of one and two letters respectively.

2   For the Lindisfarne Gospels see Kendrick *et al* (1956–60) and especially the discussion by T J Brown (op cit, II, 75–77, 93–94, 99–100) and for the Book of Kells see Alton & Meyer (1950–51). The lettering of the Ardagh chalice is described and illustrated by Dunraven (1874) and by Gógan (1932). For Anglo-Saxon inscriptions and their letter forms see Okasha (1968; 1971). For Welsh letter forms see Nash-Williams (1950, 223–34). Macalister (1945–49) illustrates the Irish inscriptions with varying degrees of accuracy. For Man see Kermode (1907). For the Continent see works cited in Higgitt (1979, n 32), especially Deschamps (1929) and Le Blant (1896–97).

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PLATE 26 | PSAS 112
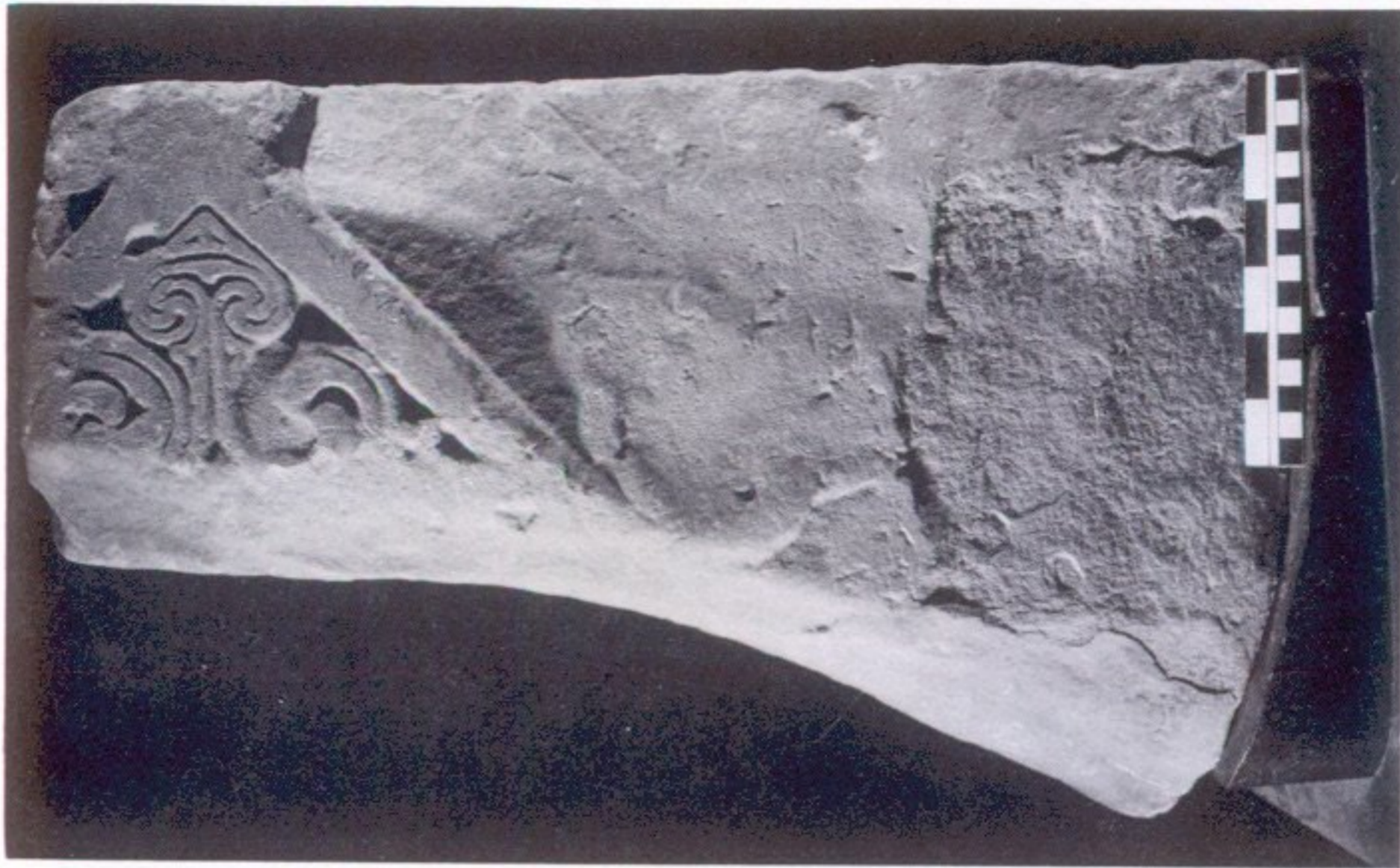
b   Tarbat fragment: decorated face to left of inscribed face
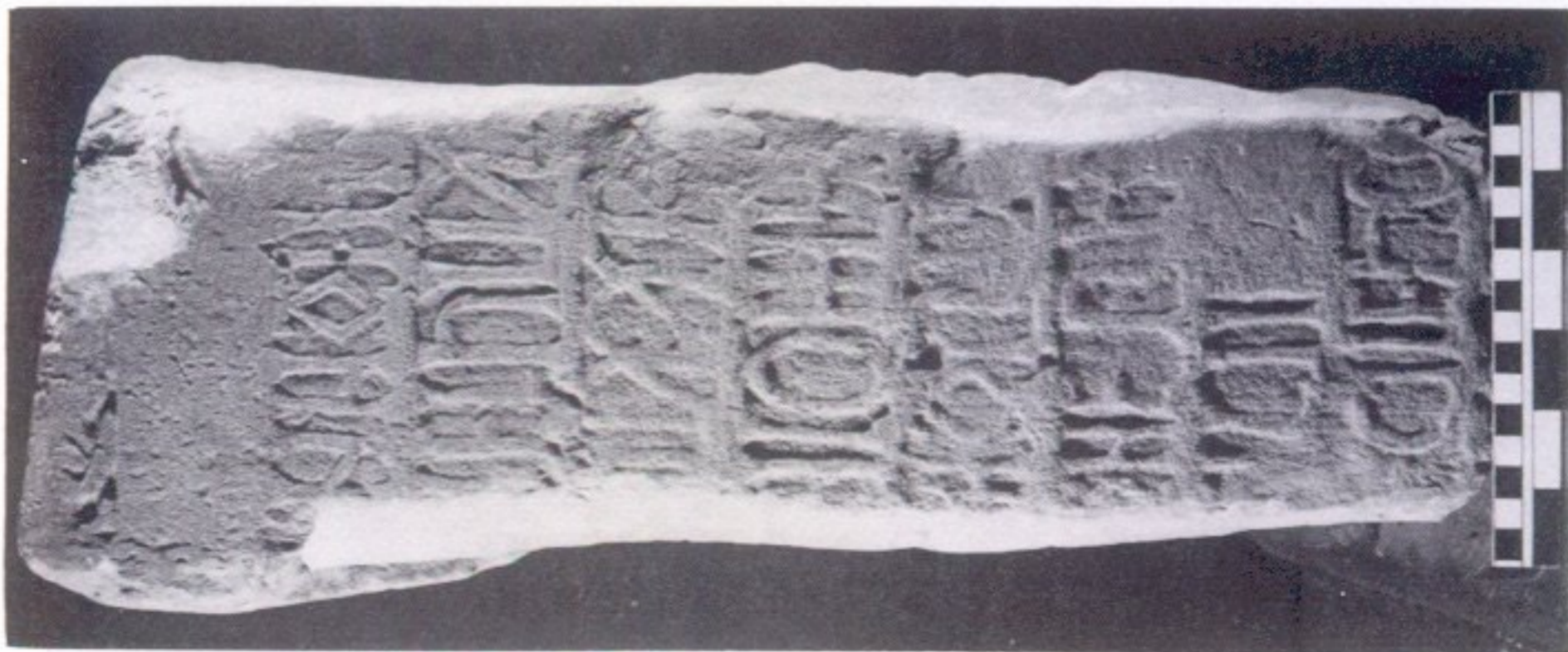
a   Tarbat fragment: inscribed face